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POLITICS: A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Edited by
Mathew Illathuparambil**

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A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

Politics: A Theological Perspective

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Editorial

Politics is a buzzword resonated as emphatically with academic discussions as with pedestrian talks. It rightly suggests that all aspects of contemporary life are under the spell of local, national or global politics. It affects the way families plan their budgets, earn their livelihood and manage their social life. Areas of social life unaffected by political impact are few. In addition to the rightful domains of politics, sometimes it tries also to influence or even intrude into the realm of personal choices and preferences of people such as the size of one's family, religious practices etc.

Though overwhelming is the influence of politics in human life and the way we conduct our life, for many 'good' people politics is a dirty topic. Often they identify the concerns of politics with party politics. Despite some isolated discussions on politics in theology as well as in the teachings of the church, it seems that Christian tradition has not yet succeeded in firmly establishing that politics is also a subject matter of theological discourse. It may not be wrong to argue that Christians, especially, Catholics do not have an adequate theology of citizenship. It is this two-fold reason, namely, the overall significance of politics on the one hand, and the general disregard of politics in theology on the other hand, that justifies this issue of *Jeevadhara* to reflect on politics from a theological perspective.

Though not many in number the existing teaching of the church creates the right impression that politics is too important a topic to be disregarded by theology and the church, and to be left exclusively to the will and pleasure of politicians. The Puebla document of the Latin American bishops' conference, for example, spells out this idea very well: "The political dimension is a constitutive dimension of human beings and a relevant area of social life. It has an all-embracing aspect

because its aim is the common welfare of society.” Warning against the withdrawal of Christians from political life, Vatican II gives the following exhortation: “It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each ... May Christians ... be proud of the opportunity to carry out their earthly activity in such a way as to integrate human, domestic, professional, scientific and technical enterprises with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are ordered to the glory of God” (GS 43). These key suggestions form the rationale of the reflections undertaken in this issue of *Jeevadhara*.

The first Contribution by Paul Chittinappilly explores the relationship between religion and politics. Any solid theological discussion on politics must be preceded by an analysis of the relation between religion and politics, especially in the multireligious context of India. The author argues that religions have to recover their prophetic role. Only then they can fulfill the basic function of enabling humans to celebrate their fundamental orientation toward the Transcendence.

The second essay by Jacob Naluparayil explains the politics of Jesus, relatively a not much researched theme among academics. He claims that Jesus was not political in the ordinary sense of party politics. And yet he *was* political. Jesus’ politics was inspired by his liberating stance throughout his ministry.

The essay written by Thomas Kozhimala analyses the political vision of Gustavo Gutiérrez. This essay is meant to illustrate how a theologian engaged in liberation praxis views politics. For accounts on purely political theology there are better choices such as Johannes Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann. The reason why Gutiérrez is introduced here is that he responds to the claims of the typical political theology from his committed endeavor for liberation—a stance of permanent value, especially in developing countries like India. This essay shows that Gutiérrez’s arguments are based on the conviction of a continuous eschatology, which would deal with the continuity

between the exercise of freedom in this world and the final state of things.

Varghese Ukken in his essay explores the social teachings of the church on politics. For this end, he closely reads the social encyclicals as well as a few relevant magisterial documents. His attempt shows both the richness as well as the limitation of the official teaching of the church on this particular topic. Perhaps, the most emphatic claim of the social teachings of the church on politics, as this essay illustrates, is that all the faithful have the right and duty to take active part in politics. It can make a valuable contribution to the society.

The relation between church and politics is of mutual interest to both. The essay by Mathew Illathuparampil examines the dynamics of the relationship between the two, mostly from a theological perspective. The author argues that the church must engage in politics, certainly not for its own gain but to ensure common good. Its role in politics is identified in its educative-advocacy and prophetic-witnessing roles. Finally this essay offers certain conditions for a fruitful and blameless intervention of the church into politics.

Mathew Illathuparampil

By the General Editor

The Editorial Board of *Jeevadhara* is extremely grateful to Rev. Dr. Thomas Srampickal for his efficient editing of the *Jeevadhara* issue on "The Fullness of Life" from 1991 - 2000 and his well-thought-out and balanced contributions. Amidst his manifold activities as the Rector of one of our largest Seminaries and as professor of Moral Theology he could find time for organising the issue so well. He was ever punctual in attending our Editorial Board meetings and always actively participated in our discussions. We have been expecting his continued services and hence this delay in acknowledging his services.

Rev. Dr. John Padipurackal was the Editor of the issue immediately after Dr. Srampickal from 2001-2004. We appreciate his scholarship and his contributions and are grateful to all his services. We are sorry he could not continue editing because of his varied activities and engagements.

Religion and Politics

Paul Chittinappilly

Paul Chittinappilly, who holds a doctorate in theology from KU Leuven Belgium, heads the theology program for lay people in the Archdiocese of Angamaly-Ernakulam. He examines in this essay the dynamics of the relation between religion and politics, with special reference to modern India.

That religion plays a vital role in the lives of ordinary people is no matter of contest. So also is politics all pervading nature. It is doubtful if there is an issue more controversial than that of the relationship between religion and politics. Being spheres of power and having enormous popular appeal they impact on life very substantially, whether as unholy collaborators or as fierce adversaries.¹

Without entering into formalistic definitions we may say that by religion we understand significant meaning-systems that can provide a philosophy as well as a way of life to people. According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, it stands for a sense of the depth dimension, a push toward some sort of ultimacy and transcendence that will take hold of one's life. "When more or less distinct patterns of behaviour are built around this depth dimension in a culture, this structure constitutes religion in its historically recognizable form. Religion is the organization of life around the depth dimensions of experience—varied in form, completeness and clarity in accordance with the environing culture" (Winston King, *Ency. of Religion*, 7693). When we speak of religions, then, we mean those organized or established religions.

1 For a useful exposition, from the Indian context and from a social activist's perspective, see Valson Thampu, *Religion and Politics*, Media House, Delhi, 1999.

In the same way politics (from the Greek word, “polis”) is basically concerned about how a group (polity) organizes itself so as to ensure and promote its survival and well-being. It is in this sense that Dictionaries define politics as “the art and science of government”.

From a socio-historical perspective, all religions are considered to have had their origins as social interventions, as responses to social needs for order and peace. In the case of Israelites, when monotheistic Yahwism was still not fully adhered to, we know how the Old Testament prophets intervened and called people, especially the rulers to look back to the pre-monarchic days and return to a more communitarian way of life.

The early Jesus movement can also be viewed as concerned about the social and economic disintegration of the time. Its social intervention was aimed at reforming the Israelite community. This they did with the new preaching of the Kingdom of God whereby they said God was changing the current situation and creating a new community that calls for mutual forgiveness of debts and sharing of possessions. In the Indian context earliest traditions connected with Buddhism may also be considered a classic case of a group of people (the *Sangha*) concerned about envisioning a new society.² Hence, the first and basic conclusion to be drawn is that both politics and religion are concerned about envisioning a better society. In this way it is extremely important how we conceive their mutual relationship and collaboration.

Religion as a Potent Political Factor

The last couple of decades have witnessed a constant invocation of religion in the arena of politics. American president George Bush says he is guided by religion in his crusade against terrorism. Osama bin Laden, on the other hand, declares that he is waging a holy war (*Jihad*) against what he considers the greatest Satan. Our own home-bred Hindutva ideologists too claim that the objective of making India

2 For a detailed analysis of these concepts, P. Chittinappilly, *Reimagining Prophetic Alternatives: Towards a Historical Reconstruction of the Ancient Israelite Prophecy & the Early Jesus and Buddhist Movements*, (unpublished doctoral dissertation) Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, 2002.

a Hindu *Rashtra* (nation) is also guided by religion. Remember L. K. Advani, the pioneer of Ram Temple movement which brought Hindutva to the fore and thus created the platform for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to assume political power. He says it is of no use to him if there was no religion in politics. Alongside such fundamentalist streams it is also to be admitted that movements like liberation theology in its different forms have also taken part and influenced socio-political developments in several parts of the world, especially in Latin America during 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, religion has become a potent political factor, coming to the aid of forces at both ends of the spectrum: conservative and radical.³ In this respect it can be easily seen that except perhaps for the last hundred or more years (the so-called age of secularism), religion has played a significant role, for the good as well as the bad, in the evolution of human civilization. While religion has been grossly misused by certain people, particularly by those with power to maintain the status quo, it has also enabled people to articulate, to intervene and protest against human suffering. And religion continues to do so even today.

Religious Society and Secular Constitution

Religion and politics are naturally linked to the concepts of democracy, secularism and communalism. In our country it has been a fashion for all, whether political parties or social and even religious organizations, to claim that they are all secular. If the Congress, the Communists, the Muslim League and the BJP equally claim that they are for secularism, this goes to show that the meaning each one gives to secularism is not the same. The concept of secular is normally understood as being indifferent to or even against religion. But even in the so-called secular Western democracies, political parties with religious names are quite common as in the case of Christian Democratic or Christian Socialist Parties of Europe and North America. Issues like abortion, for example, are paraded as religious issues during political processes like elections.

3 See S. Lourdasamy, *Religion as Political Weapon*, Multi Book Agency, Culcatta, 1990.

History is replete with examples of holy as well as unholy alliances between religion and politics. In the U.S., for example, the movement for the abolition of slavery gathered momentum when many Church leaders openly supported and actively led the movement. The same can be said about the civil rights movement of the 1960s. History also speaks about how President Ronald Reagan and Vice-President George Bush were beneficiaries of a well-publicized alliance with the Christian Right groups. A leader of the Moral Majority, an influential conservative group of the time had in fact described these leaders as "God's instruments in rebuilding America."⁴ Now it is a matter of debate if such mixing of religion with politics produces good or bad results.

India is a multi-religious society with a secular constitution. It may be good to remember that Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation and some other political leaders of his era were never apologetic about the role religion plays in their lives or in politics. They did certainly mix religion with politics. But they were all convinced that for proper functioning of democracy, and for the unity and integrity of a highly pluralistic, heterogenous, fragmented and segmented society like India, it was essential to root out communalism and communal parties from the body politic of the nation. Communalism may be simply understood as organizing people for political interests along religious or caste lines. Communalism would involve not only calling other communities as 'the other', but also denying them their 'otherness'. Hence no party that exclusively depended on a religion or caste for its membership could be allowed to engage in political activities. While participating in the debate for such a resolution in the Constitutional Assembly, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had already warned that the combination of politics and religion in the narrowest sense of the word, resulting in communal politics, was "a most dangerous combination and must be put an end to."⁵

4 S. D. Johnson & J. B. Tamney, eds, *The Political Role of Religion in the United States*, 1986, 99-100, 338.

5 Cited by Subhash C. Kashyap, *Delinking Religion and Politics*, VIMOT, New Delhi, 1993, 10.

However, the Indian Constitution does not advocate a complete dissociation of religion from politics, either. While respecting the good intentions of the Constitutional fathers, the reservation made for the low and backward classes on the basis of caste and religion was thought to undo the secular character of the Constitution. Dr. Shyam Prasad Mookerjee of the Constitutional Assembly had emphasized this point. He said:

If we are really anxious to uproot communalism from the political sphere in India altogether, we shall have to see that there is no place for communalism of any kind whatsoever in the Constitution of our country. You cannot justify reservations on ground of religion or caste and in the same breath say that you want to banish communalism from the political life of India.⁶

This, of course, calls for an examination of the nature of secularism the Constitutional fathers had in mind. Today, religious names and symbols are freely used (*tilak*, saffron and other robes, etc.) by active politicians. Politicians participating in religious festivals and activities along with religious leaders are regular scenes in the media. The national flag itself has a religious symbol in its center: the *Dharma Chakra*, popularly known as Asoka's wheel. It all means that secularism in the literal Western sense of complete separation of religion from political sphere cannot be applied to the Indian context. That was not what the Constitutional fathers had in mind either. Nehru's words are emphatic: "We have laid down in our Constitution that India is a secular state. That does not mean irreligion. It means equal respect for all faiths and equal opportunities for those who profess any faith."⁷

Equal respect does not mean mere neutrality of the state (*Dharma Nirapekshata*). More positively, India would treat all religions alike or with equal respect (*Sarva Dharma Samabhava*). In the words of Rajeev Dhavan, the state will not only respect all faiths but will also

6 Cited by Subhash C. Kashyap, *Delinking Religion and Politics*, VIMOT, New Delhi, 1993, 11.

7 Cited by Subhash C. Kashyap, *Delinking Religion and Politics*, 14.

neutrally assist and celebrate them.⁸ Indeed, secularism here means that India is first of all a non-theocratic state; it does not identify with any particular religion; in its eyes all religions are equal; it will not also make any distinction between citizens on the basis of religion; the state will deal with every citizen as a citizen irrespective of his/her religion (or no religion) with freedom of religion guaranteed to every individual.⁹

Thus the vision of the founding fathers of the nation was clear. They envisaged a nation transcending all diversities of religion, caste and creed. They had hoped that with the emergence of a new socio-political order caste and religious differences would gradually disappear. But when we look back after almost sixty years of independence, the opposite seems to have happened. What we see is the nation thinking and acting more and more on religious and caste lines. We have a religious society that has a secular state. Not only constitutional amendments and laws have been made that discriminate people on communal and caste lines but also the misuse of religion by political parties cannot be effectively prevented. As social scientist P. P. Rao finds:

Political parties, some of the state governments and the superior judiciary - all of them have to share responsibility for this – politicians for mixing religion and caste with politics for electoral gains, the governments by making caste the basis for reservation of appointments and posts as well as seats in educational institutions and the judiciary by recognizing 'caste' as a relevant factor for identifying backward classes for the purposes of reservation.¹⁰

According to S.N. Mishra, secularism in India is in fact bleeding. He says:

The palm of almost every politician bears the blood stains of a bleeding secularism. With the process of deideologisation nearing

8 R. Dhavan, "The Road to Xanadu: India's Quest for Secularism," in K.N. Panikkar, ed., *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*, Viking, New Delhi, 1999, 34-72, 48.

9 Subhash C. Kashyap, *Delinking Religion and Politics*, 18.

10 P. P. Rao, "Social Diversities and Nation Formation," in S. D. Kashyap, ed., *Perspectives on the Constitution*, 11C. Shipra, Delhi, 1993, 46.

completion, casteism and communalism are bound to step in as successors, no matter how illegitimate they are ... Now no party can think of setting up a candidate without any caste and communal considerations. In fact the spirit of nationalism has waned so precipitously under the impact of competitive politics of elections that all kinds of particularistic trends are on the rise and Indians without denominational labels are a dying species.¹¹

Hence, even if theoretically well grounded and constitutionally prescribed, for a secular state to be a living reality what is necessary is a secularization of the society, that is, civil society internalizing the attributes of secularism.¹² If the ideal of secularism is to be viable, it has to be rooted in the social process of secularization, like any other ideal for that matter. Put in most simple words, by secularization is meant a process in which people's lives (including their private habits and motivations) come to be increasingly determined by values and symbols other than religion.¹³ Of course, such a process, to be influential on humans, has to be grounded upon rational values aimed at human liberation. But that need not be the case always. Not all rationalization is liberating. "Thus, *laissez-faire* liberal capitalism rationalizes the economy towards greater productivity, but it was hardly liberating for the 'proletariat'. So too was caste a rationalization of social interaction in terms of a hierarchy that was inhumanly oppressive for those at the bottom of the social pyramid."¹⁴ In fact, it is now becoming increasingly clear that religion need not always be oppressive. The radical and revolutionary response generated by liberation theologies over against exploitation and oppression shows that religion cannot be simply identified with unreason or social conservatism. Indeed, religion and secularism need not be considered opposites.

11 S. N. Mishra, "Secularism: A Moment of Truth," *Hindustan Times*, Feb. 14, 1993.

12 K.N. Panikkar, ed., *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism*. Viking, New Delhi, 1999, x.

13 R. C. Heredia, "Secularism and Secularisation: Nation Building in a Multi-Religious Society," in R. C. Heredia & E. Mathias, ed., *Secularism and Liberation: Perspectives and Strategies for India Today*. Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1995, 11-37.

14 *Ibid*, 18-19.

In this respect, characterization of traditional pre-modern society as religious and modern society as secular, according to Rudolf Heredia, amounts to superficial stereotyping, not useful ideal-typing. As far as Indian situation is concerned it is far more complex. Citing Gail Omvedt and Joshi P.C. approvingly, Heredia argues that many of the ancient and medieval Indian religious movements can be appropriately seen as part of a secularization process: the Upanishads, for example, were a secularization of Vedic religion. Jainism and Buddhism can also be seen as Kshatriya attempts that successfully for a time, secularized/rationalised Brahmanic Hinduism with a non-theistic way of life. In the same way the *bhakti* and the *sufi* movements may also be easily termed as expressions of popular aspirations for equality and liberation. It will not be far from the truth to say that such humanistic and life-affirming movements had already prepared the soil for the germination and growth of the modern concept of secularism that received a breakthrough during the national struggle for independence and got crystallized in the constitution.¹⁵

Can religion be integrated with politics?

Most important thing here is to ask on what basis this can be done. If one were to define the interface between politics and religion from a political standpoint, rather than a spiritual standpoint, it can easily degenerate into communalism. As we said earlier, to Gandhiji, politics was inseparable from religion even when some of his contemporaries had warned that it was neither feasible nor desirable. He let his religious faith be the wellspring of his public life and service. "For me," he used to say, "every, the tiniest, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion."¹⁶ He believed that it was imperative to bring religious values into politics. Indeed, Gandhiji may be considered perhaps the keenest exponent of intentionally interpolating politics with religious values.¹⁷ Politics must have a moral basis. Politics without principles is a sin and a dirty game, he used to say.

15 Ibid. 20-21.

16 M.K. Gandhi, "A Letter," *Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol.I, May 30, 1932.

17 For a brief exploration of the moral and political thought of Gandhi, Vivek Pinto, "The Religion of Humanity," *The Hindu*, July 31, 2005.

Even though Gandhiji's idea of religion cannot be reduced to mere ethics, he conceived it very much in terms of moral righteousness and service to humanity. Without holding on to the moral basis one cannot be religious. He used to say that one cannot be untruthful, cruel or incontinent and claim to have God on his side! This is why he called his religion -religion of Truth.

To be true to such religion," he used to say, "one has to lose oneself in continuous and continuing service to all life. Realization of truth is impossible without a complete merging of oneself in, and identification with, this limitless ocean of life. Hence, for me, there is no escape from social service.¹⁸

Indeed, to be a man of religion, he had to involve in politics. Politics was his way of serving the Truth, serving humanity.

As Stephen Carter (*The Culture of Disbelief*, 1993) observes, there may be nothing wrong and much right in letting oneself guided by religious convictions.

At the same time, one whose moral judgments are driven by religious devotion must be ever careful to discern whether God's word or human politics is doing the work. For there is a vast difference between a political inspiration that is fired by one's deepest religious beliefs and a claim of religious belief that is fired by a pre-existing political commitment. It is the job of the religiously devout citizen to understand and preserve this distinction, one that unfortunately is blurred, and perhaps disbelieved, by our political rhetoric, as well as by our mass media.¹⁹

Strengthening Secular Basis

Secularism is not a mere Western concept. Although it began in the West, it came up not to sort out disputes between religions. It emerged with the introduction of industrialization as well as development of science and technology that in turn paved the way for a weakening of the divine power of the kings (and landlords) and clergy. Until that time the king (son of God), and the landlords as their

18 Cited in Vivek Pinto, "The Religion of Humanity," *The Hindu*, July 31, 2005.

19 Cited in Vivek Pinto, "The Religion of Humanity," *The Hindu*, July 31, 2005.

representatives, thought that their right to rule had the divine sanction. The clergy as the custodian of religion was the legitimizer of this ideology. With the secularization process their social hold fell apart. The inner logic of this process was to do away with the hierarchy of caste and gender.

In the Indian context, the process of secularization took the form of opposing inferior treatment to the *Shudra* and women at the social level and relegating the clergy-landlords at political level. The major exponents of this process at the social and political level were Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar, Gandhi, Nehru and Maulana Azad.²⁰ It is important to see that all of them identified religion not with the dictates of the clergy but the humanistic ideals of the saints. Gandhi reiterated the point saying:

Indeed religion should pervade everyone of our action. Here religion does not mean sectarianism. It means belief in the ordered moral government of the universe. It is not less real because it is unseen. This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes and gives them reality.²¹

Gandhiji and others were convinced that in a multicultural and pluri-religious country like India no real nationalism could be built up except on a secular basis that respects and celebrates all religions.

Conclusion: Recovering the Prophetic Role of Religion

As we noted in the beginning both religion and politics are concerned about envisioning and establishing a society that can serve as a beautiful home for all the people. Within the foundational liberative perspective of the Constitution, we need today to re-imagine the role of religion. The constitutional fathers expected religion to make valuable contributions to nation-building by inculcating values of peace, harmony, tolerance and selfless service. If such hopes were not totally fulfilled and instead religion came to be exploited and manipulated for narrow

20 Ram Puniyani, "Religion, Politics and the Moderns State," *Crosscurrents*, August 31, 2004.

21 M.K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, Feb.10, 1940.

political gains, now it is time to recover and revitalize the original ideals of religions. While they may continue to fulfill the basic function of enabling humans to celebrate their fundamental orientation toward Transcendence, they have to do it today in a manner that is more relevant.

Socio-historical investigations into the origins of various religions show that all of them emerged with a prophetic dynamism. Such dynamism expressed itself in conceiving reality differently and proposing new visions alternative to those held currently by people. To be sure, a prophet is not a mere critic of society. In a sociological sense a movement may be understood as prophetic insofar as it endeavours "to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture"²² of a given period. As Walter Brueggemann has explained, this alternative consciousness functions in two ways.²³ On the one hand, it serves to criticize the dominant consciousness, indeed the grossly uncritical dominant culture that little tolerates criticism, so as to reject and delegitimize the established ordering of things. On the other hand, it serves to energize persons and communities so as to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that is to come. In other words prophets and prophetic movements are not mere critics of the way things are; they help people to imagine new possibilities.

The prophets perceive that the present organizing of social power and social goods is only a *managed* and *controlled* system although presented by those benefitting from it as the only possible social reality. Indeed, by appealing to an authority (usually, the divine) higher than the highest within the established social arrangements, prophets or prophetic movements are not only making a devastating critique of the present, they actually insist on imagining the world differently. They will thus maintain what Brueggemann calls a "destabilizing presence" in the society.

Such is the prophetic role a religion has to play in relationship to today's misguided political developments. Concerted attempts are

22 W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1978, 13.

23 W. BRUEGGEMANN, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 13-14.

being made by the Sangh Parivar to redefine the nation in religious terms. Even the history of the nation is being reinterpreted making use of Hindu religious myths. They are in fact parading mere myths as history. It is not merely a distortion of facts but in a way an attempt to declare that the nation belongs to the Hindus.²⁴ The exponents of cultural and religious nationalism (that is, Hindu nation) have started advocating that India being the land of diverse people living in peace, it being a land of spirituality, secularism is unnecessary here. That is exactly the fear of the minorities here: once the Constitution loses its secular character, they will be unsafe. After targeting Muslim community for a long time as the number one enemy, the Hindu extremists and fundamentalists are coming down heavily on Christians today. Several states (Orissa, MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh) dominated by the cultural nationalists have already made new laws on conversion that deride the secular ideal of the constitution. Other states (like AP) are under pressure to make new laws in favour of Hindu temples and institutions (for example, Tirupati-Tirumalai hills). As social and political scientists have repeatedly cautioned, the Hindutva politics is not merely concerned about religious or temple issues. It is, in fact, aimed at marginalization of India's real problems, especially that of the poor and the Dalits. Prophetic religion is the best counterpoint to such fundamentalist and religious politics. Religious traditions have to recover their original prophetic role of not only criticizing the degeneration of politics but also advocating an alternative politics of liberation for all sections of society, which lies at the heart of secularism.

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24 See K. N. Panikkar, *An Agenda for Cultural Action and Other Essays*, Three Essays Press, New Delhi, 2002.

Politics of Jesus

Jacob Naluparayil

Jacob Naluparayil, a biblical scholar, is the chief editor of *Karunikan*, a leading theological journal in Malayalam. By studying the gospel according to Mark, he substantiates the politics of Jesus, especially from the perspective of his struggle to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Introduction

Was Jesus political or apolitical?¹ Or how *directly* does Jesus' ministry address public affairs? People may respond differently to this question. Very few of the modern Bible scholars speak of Jesus apolitically. Many would promptly agree that Jesus' ministry was not about establishing a political kingdom. At the same time, it would be totally wrong to hold that his life and teaching had nothing to do with politics. Then in what sense can we speak of the political stance of Jesus?

It is probably a mistake to try to fit Jesus into any of our modern political labels: left-wing, right-wing, socialist or capitalist. The political world of his time was just too different from that of ours. But it is equally wrong to say that he was only interested in "religion" and steered clear of all political issues. Hence the purpose of this article is to read the gospel story with a new question: Do the life and teaching of Jesus have a political edge? Are his life and teaching resources to give guidance to our socio-political life?

Method

The political stance of Jesus is the object of this article. Right away one might ask which Jesus. In this article I am not interested in

1 I use 'political' in its usual sense, to mean 'relating to public life, state or civil affairs' and in particular, public matters against private interests.

finding out the socio-political stance of the historical Jesus. To be more precise, I propose to read the canonical text of the gospel according to Mark with the question "Is there a social-political-ethical option in the life and teachings of Jesus?"²

For this purpose I intend to use narrative criticism as the methodological tool.³ The goal of narrative criticism is to read the text as the implied reader.⁴ Hence what is intended here is a narrative reading of the gospel of Mark, i.e., reading Mark as the implied reader. For, the text should be read for what its author meant to say and what its first readers or hearers would have heard it say.

Political Traits of Jesus' Ministry

Before embarking on the narrative reading of the ministry of Jesus, I mean to look into some of the obvious political traits present during the trial of Jesus. For that purpose the best example is the inscription on the cross: "And the inscription of charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews'" (Mk 15:26).⁵ This shows that Jesus died the death of a political criminal. Even the mockery of the religious hierarchy, comprising of the chief priests and the Torah experts carried political overtones. They said: "Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe" (15: 32). Why

2 For a reading of the gospel of Luke with the same scope, see J.H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, Michigan, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.

3 On the theory and practice of narrative criticism, see S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, London, Cornell University, 1978 (theory of NC); S.D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels. The Oretical Challenge*, London, Yale University, 1989, 14-107 (theory of Gospel NC); M.A. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship: New Testament Guides 12), Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 1990 (theory and practice of Gospel NC); D. Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism: Practices and Prospects", in: D. Rhoads - K. Syreeni, *Characterization in the Gospels. Reconceiving Narrative Criticism* (JSNT SS 184), Sheffield (1999) 264-285.

4 Implied reader is a literary construct. Implied reader of Mark is the literary image of the intended readers of the gospel of Mark.

5 For the analysis on the political trial of Jesus, see F.J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus. Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (SBL DS 66), Chicago, Scholars, 1982; D.H. Juel, *Messiah and Temple. The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBL DS 31), Missoula, Scholars, 1977.

Jesus whose main concern is to be apolitical would be misunderstood in just this way instead of some other way? Traditionally we have been used to reading these texts with the assumption that all this is to be taken “spiritually”. But is this all what Mark wanted his readers to understand?

When Jesus stands under trial before Pilate, the charge against him is political. “And Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ (15: 2). This allegation is repeatedly echoed throughout the trial of Jesus (Mk 15:9, 12, 18, 26). The language of the trial scene and the picture of the man under trial are much more political than cultic. Roman soldiers lead Jesus into praetorium and they clothe him, salute him, strike him, spit him, kneel before him, and mock him (15:16-20). These actions are centered around the royal images robe, crown, salutation, and showing homage by kneeling. What is under display is a mockery of the Kingship of Jesus.

When Jesus goes to Jerusalem, he goes as a king riding a donkey—an undeniably political figure. All the more, one hears royal acclamations from the crowd at his Jerusalem entry. “Hosanna! Blessed is the one coming in the Lord’s name! Blessed is the coming reign of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (11: 9b-10).⁶ Jesus enters the royal city of Jerusalem as the Davidic king. Above all, the core of his ministry is the announcement and establishment of the Kingdom of God (Mk 1:15). In short, Jesus all throughout his public ministry tried to establish a kingdom and finally he was condemned to death as a king. Are they not sufficient evidences to prove that his life and ministry had a political trend?

The Kingdom that Jesus Proclaimed

When one takes up the narrative reading of the gospel of Mark, at the very outset one comes across a politically tinted concept of the Kingdom of God, which is central to Jesus’ teaching and ministry. Jesus announced the coming of the Kingdom and invited people to become part of it by changing their mindsets. “*The time has been*

6 On Mk 11:1-11, see K.H. Tan. *The Zion Traditions and the aims of Jesus* (SNTS MS 91), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 143-145, 148-157.

fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15). The content of the good news that Jesus announces is the fulfillment of the right time for the commencement of the Kingdom of God.

All subsequent activities of Jesus demonstrate the arrival of the Kingdom that has been announced through his words.⁷ The healing of the possessed man in the synagogue (1:23-28) tells the reader that the kingdom of Satan has come to an end, resulting in the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. The unclean spirits articulate clearly Jesus' mission (1:24): "*What [is] between us and you, Jesus Nazarene? Did you come to destroy us?*" They know that he has come to destroy them (1:24). It unveils Jesus' way of establishing the Kingdom of God, viz. by destroying the kingdom of the evil spirits or by liberating human beings from the bondage of Satan. In the house of Simon, Jesus heals his mother-in-law by a mere touch (1:29-31)! Thereafter, at the end of the first day Jesus performs numerous healings and exorcisms (1:32-34) manifesting the arrival of the Kingdom of God, which liberates men and women from sickness and bondage. The reader would easily take him as the authorized person to make radical social change as he is breaking the bondage of his people.

When a leper beseeches Jesus to heal him, *moved by compassion* he stretches out his hand, touches the leper (1:40-42)!⁸ Thus he violated the purity laws by touching what the ritual system considered unclean. The reader finds it also as part of Jesus' mission of establishing the Kingdom. When Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic and heals him (2:1-10), the reader would find Jesus subverting the boundaries by healing and forgiving sins outside the established socio-religious system. It would reveal that the Kingdom of God has expanded to the realm of forgiving sins. In other words, for Jesus the establishment of the Kingdom means liberating people from Satan, sickness, and sin.⁹

7 For an analysis, see J.C. Naluparayil, *The Identity of Jesus in Mark. An Essay on Narrative Christology* (SBF Analecta 49), Jerusalem, Franciscan Printing Press, 2000, pp. 310-322.

8 See W.R.G. Loader, "Challenged at the Boundaries: A Conservative Jesus in Mark's Tradition", *JSNT* 63 (1996), pp. 51-58.

9 The Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus' mission is neither entirely 'now' nor entirely 'yet to come'. Thus there are two possible errors here. We could

Jesus is accused of the bad company he keeps, viz. eating with tax collectors and sinners (2:15-16).¹⁰ In the society governed by purity laws, eating was a socio-political act and whom you ate with mattered. Jesus by his table fellowship transcended the strict social boundaries and consequently aimed for an egalitarian and inclusive society. He took it as part of his mission of establishing the Kingdom.

When Jesus answers Pharisees' accusation of the disciples' Sabbath violation with the example of David (2:23-26), he establishes a parallelism between himself and King David. This would resound to the reader as a political claim. However, as his discourse progresses (cf. 2:27-28), the reader witnesses that Jesus implicitly asserts his *superiority over King David*. When Jesus announces that human being is more valuable than the Sabbath laws (2:27), he initiates the right kind of liberation human from religious laws.

In the synagogue, placing the man with the withered hand at the centre of attention (3:1-3), Jesus shows the precedence of human welfare over strict observance of the Sabbath laws (3:4). Subsequent healing of the sick man substantiates that Jesus' making of the Kingdom involves the liberation of men and women from the religious establishment also. As a reaction, the Pharisees consult Herodians about destroying Jesus (3:6). That is, the representatives of the religious and political establishments plot to kill Jesus, for proclaiming the Kingdom of God.¹¹

The reader would suspect that Jesus challenged social and political understandings of his society and advocated an alternative social vision in the name of the Kingdom of God. However, Jesus' Kingdom

confine the Kingdom largely to the future, denying its effective presence in the world for today and minimizing its political dimension. On the other hand, to believe that the Kingdom can be fulfilled within the present age is to ignore the plain teaching of Scripture. This is to attribute too much to the politics of the Kingdom.

- 10 See the importance given to the fellowship with "sinners and the tax-collectors" by repeating that phrase three times in this periscope (2:15, 16 [twice]).
- 11 On Mk 3:16, see J.D.M. Derret, "Christ and the Power of Choice (Mark 3,1-6)", *Biblica* 65(1984), 168-188; S.H. Smith, "Mark 3,1-6: Form, Redaction and Community Function", *Biblica* 75 (1994), 153-174.

program was not just about politics or economics as distinct from theology. It combined religion, politics, and economics; it was about divine distributive justice; it was about the ownership of this world; it was about liberating humans from the power of Satan and sickness, sin, and the oppressive religious establishments.

Secret of the Kingdom Revealed to the Disciples

Once the religious and political leaders plot to kill Jesus (3: 6), he names his twelve key followers: To organized opposition, he responds with the founding of a new social group. From among an enormous crowd (3:7-9) he constitutes the group of twelve disciples (3:13-19). He selects them by making them the “insiders” and the “participants” of his mission of establishing the Kingdom of God (3:13-19; 4:10; 5:37; 6:7-13, 30). Besides, the reader would notice that by welcoming women as members of his itinerant group (15: 40-41) he subverted some of the most sacred taboos of his time. The characteristic feature of these “insiders” is that they display a positive approach to Jesus and his ministry of establishing the Kingdom of God (3:32-35; 4:10-12). They do the will of God, believe in Jesus, and thereby become the true family of Jesus (3:32-35).

Jesus tries to disclose the secret of the Kingdom (4:10-12) to the selected group of the twelve. He does this by providing them with additional explanations of the parables (4:10, 13-20, 34; 7:17-23) and the private miracles performed for them (4:35-41; 5:1-13, 25-34, 35-43; 6:30-44, 45-51; 8:1-10).¹² His objective was that they might understand the secret of the Kingdom of God. However, the reader is unaware of what the secret of the Kingdom is all about. As he reaches 8:31-32, he gets a glimpse of the delayed secret with regard to the Kingdom. While chapter four of Mark presented the Kingdom in parables (4:33), Mk 8:32 speaks about the word (Kingdom) clearly, indicating that what is said in 8: 31 is the secret of the Kingdom. That means Jesus’ destiny of suffering, death, and resurrection constitute the secret of the Kingdom.¹³ In short cross of Jesus forms the secret of the Kingdom.

12 On this see, Naluparayil, *The Identity of Jesus*, pp. 323-345.

13 Similar opinion by E. Schweizer, “The Question of the Messianic Secret in Mark”, in *Messianic Secret*, ed., C.M. Tuckett, London, SPCK, 1983, 68.

Subsequently, Jesus demands that the disciple also has to share in his style of life that culminates in the cross (8: 34). That means the disciples would need to suffer with him in his ministry of suffering and death. This first explicit mention of the cross would reveal to the first readers of Mark that it is an alternative to both the violent rebellion (of the Zealots)¹⁴ and the passive withdrawal from society (of the Essenes).¹⁵ This way of the cross is the new way that Jesus expounds through which his Kingdom gets actualized.¹⁶ One finds that Jesus insists on training his core group of disciples in this path of the cross in the middle section of the gospel (Mk 8:31-10:52).¹⁷ No informed reading of his life can avoid his call to a life marked by the cross, a cross which was the punishment of a man who threatens society by creating a new kind of community leading a radically new way of life.

The reader finds a climaxing point of Jesus' training in Mk 10:43-45: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord [it] over them and their great men exercise authority [over] them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For indeed the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."¹⁸

14 The term Zealots could be used generally for those involved in or sympathetic to revolutionary activity. A third political option of that time, besides those of the Zealots and the Essenes, was that of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Both parties could be described as more concerned about their well-being than challenging the status quo. Politically, the Pharisees were quite prepared to criticize the ruling authorities, but their primary concern was to maintain their own observance of the Torah and urge it on others. On the other hand the main significance of the Sadducees lies in their holding political power in Jerusalem. The High Priests were Sadducees and were quite willing to co-operate with the Roman authorities in order to preserve the status quo and their own position.

15 The Qumran sect was presumably an Essene sub-group who had withdrawn into ascetic seclusion in protest against the corruption of the Jerusalem establishment. The Essenes in general rejected the Temple and its ruling group; and even the withdrawal to Qumran was very much a political statement.

16 Indeed, since all these groups represent political as much as religious positions, Jesus' refusal to align himself with any of them is politically significant.

17 See Naluparayil, *The Identity of Jesus*, pp. 345-366.

18 For a discussion on this see D.O. Via (Jr.), *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel*. In the

Here Jesus contrasts the situation among the Gentiles with "the would be ideal situation" among the disciples (10:42-43): they lord [it] over them, they exercise authority [over] them, but you must be servant and slave of all. Then he introduces his own life of service and his vicarious death as the social model for the disciples so that they may reach the ideal state of service. Consequently, the ultimate contrast drawn is between the Gentile mode of exercising authority and Jesus' mode of exercising authority,¹⁹ which is through the other-centered life of service (10:45a) and through his death for others (10:45b). It is different because of the exceptionally normal quality of humanness to which the community is committed. In short, Jesus employs his authority through service and through the best service of his violent death. His intent is to train and to form a community that exercises its authority through the other-centered life of self-sacrificing love. Thereby the Kingdom would become a counter-culture where the service is power and the first will be the last.

Social Meaning of the Cross

While Jesus was in the Temple (11: 27) the chief priests and the scribes along with the elders approached him and asked him (11: 28bc): "By what authority are you doing these things?" In its immediate context it refers back to his protest against the Temple as the center of an economically and politically oppressive dominion. His activities in the Temple included the expelling of the buying and selling people, the halting of the Temple cult, and teaching of the divine design of the Temple (11:15-17). In the wider context of the gospel, their question has a wider range of examining the source of Jesus' authority, which is operative in all his deeds and words.

Jesus retorts with a counter-question regarding the source of John's baptism (11:29-30). Subsequently he answers their question with the parable of the vineyard and tenants (12:1-11).²⁰ In this parable he

Middle of Time, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1985, pp. 156-168.

19 See K. Scholtissek, *Die 'Vollmacht Jesu. Traditions- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Analysen zu einem Leitmotiv markinischer Christologie* (NeutAbh 25), Münster, Aschendorf, 1992, 235.

20 On Mk 11:27-12:12 see M.Y.-H. Lee, *Jesus und die jüdische Autorität. Eine*

depicts himself as “the beloved Son,” “my Son” (12:6) and “the Heir” of the vineyard (12:7) being sent by his Father (12:6). The reader discovers that it is with the authority of the Son who is obedient unto death that Jesus performs his deeds and issues his teachings. The source of his authority is God or his divine Sonship (cf. 12:7, 8, 12). In short, Jesus reveals that his matchless authority comes from his suffering and violent death in obedience to the will of his Father.

It is in this exercise of authority, whose core is the selfless service and the other-centered love that Jesus wanted to train his disciples in Mk 10:42-45. That would imply that there are two opposing realms of exercising authority. While the Gentiles exercise lordship and authority over others, Jesus exercises lordship and authority over himself.²¹ He exercises mastery over himself, over his ego, and over selfishness. In this sense his sovereignty is over selfishness, the source of all sins. This self-mastery reaches its maximum in his self-sacrifice for others (10: 45). In other words, it is on account of his mastery over himself that Jesus could lead a life of service that culminates in his vicarious death, which is the greatest act of service one can offer for others. The distinctive feature of the authority that Jesus exercises is its self-sacrificing nature.²² In short, it is the self-sacrificing authority that is operating through Jesus’ words and deeds.

Other characters of the story of Mark find the authority as a distinctive personality trait of Jesus (1: 22, 27). Other than Jesus only his disciples possess this authority (3:15; 6:7; 13: 34). All the more, Jesus is intent on cultivating this unique quality among his disciples (10: 42-45).

exegetische Untersuchung zu Mk 11, 27-12, 12 (FzB 56), Würzburg, Echter, 1986; M.A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel, Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1989, 233-239.

- 21 That which is contrasted is selfishness against total selflessness, or self-centeredness against other-centeredness.
- 22 In this respect the self-sacrificing authority of Jesus resembles the ahimsa of M.K. Gandhi. For a comparison of these two concepts see J.C. Naluparayil, “Self-sacrificing Exousia of Jesus and Ahimsa of Gandhi”, in J. Pathrapankal (Festschrift), *Indian Interpretation of Bible, Dharmaram*, Bangalore, 2000, 419-436.

Jesus' Politics and His Liberating Stance

Reading the gospel of Mark makes it clear that Jesus was concerned about men and women who were bound and dragged by dehumanizing social establishments. That is why he led a public life busy with healing the sick, forgiving the sinners, befriending the outcasts, keeping company with the untouchables, violating the religious practices, questioning the spiritual authorities, and provoking the social and political elite. He called for some radical social changes: an end to the social exclusion of the "spiritually unclean" (such as prostitutes and tax collectors), a more inclusive attitude to women and non-Jews, a rejection of violence, and social justice for the poor. Underlying all his teachings and actions was his vision of the Kingdom of God, which is basically a social order. The reader of the gospel would take it as a visible socio-political, economic and religious restructuring of relations among the children of God. One might view Jesus as attempting to liberate men and women from all sorts of bondages.

Love, self-sacrifice and non-violence become the means for the attainment of this goal of the Kingdom. The cross, symbolizing his suffering and death, is the way of Jesus for the total liberation of the human. Thus in the life and teaching of Jesus we find a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships.

Conclusion

Was Jesus political? Clearly he was not political in the sense of party politics. And yet he *was* political. Hence, Jesus, who called the disciples and made them participants of his mission of establishing the Kingdom of God, continues to work with the same mission. Today also he invites his disciples to get involved in social arena – the struggle of the marginalized, the plight of underpaid workers, the discrimination against women, pollution of our natural resources, ethical problems in politics, medicine, economy, and religion, and other contemporary problems. Even if we refuse to follow his social ethics, we will not be able to prove that he is irrelevant to our social and political lives.

Political Vision of Gustavo Gutiérrez

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Thomas Kozhimala teaches moral theology at Sanathana Theology Seminary, Thamarassery. This article is an attempt to introduce the liberative potentials of Christian vision of socio-political life, as elaborated by Gustavo Gutiérrez, in view of establishing the kingdom of God inspired by the divine mystery.

Contemporary theologians and ethicists study personal awareness, personal understanding, personal decision, and personal activity. At the same time community awareness and understanding, community decision and activity are not analysed in similar ways. Very often, genuine community concerns of theologians remain extra and extrinsic to their primary concerns.¹ An exclusive focus on the person and his/her internal attitudes and the failure to hold together both person and community as the primary subject matter of Christian theological reflection do not get any appreciation from the insights of contemporary social sciences. The dichotomy between personal and social should be overcome by understanding the social dimension of the personal. This issue is the problem that holds the entire works of Gustavo Gutiérrez, which calls our attention to rethink Christian vision of socio-political situation in which the Christian faithful live. Living in an inhuman context, the poor put into question the world of human relationships as understood in classical terms. In this regard a new type of social ethic has to be developed which takes seriously the structural context of human relationships and responsibility. Without this the separation of personal and social moral reflection encourages

1 E. McDonagh, "Moral Theology and Transformative Justice," in R. Gallegher & B. McConvery (eds.), *History and Conscience: Studies in Honour of Father Sean O' Ridordan*, Dublin, 1989, 73-74, p. 73.

social irresponsibility on the part of Christians. Being more aware of the interdependent dimension of being human will make us very sensitive to the dehumanising effect on social structures and on human persons in general.² This article is an attempt to introduce the liberative potentials of Christian vision of socio-political life, as elaborated by Gustavo Gutiérrez, in view of establishing the kingdom of God inspired by the divine mystery.

1. Liberation Project:

Prelude to Gutiérrez's Political Vision

Liberation from all forms of oppression poses a primary and urgent challenge to the evangelizing mission of the Church. Gustavo Gutiérrez, the father of liberation theology, articulates a theological and ethical approach, which addresses the ethical problems arising from the conflicting social realities of developing countries.³ He challenges classical theological reflections on what it means to be a Christian in a world that is marked by massive injustice.⁴ He opens a reflexive way to respond to the poor who do not ask anything except the right to good life. So he inaugurates a new way of practising theology from the underside of history and the perspective of the 'non-person'⁵. It is an attempt to make the cry of the poor heard in theology/ethics, and make the faces of strange wo/men recognisable in it.⁶ It attempts also to interrupt the closed character of systematic presentation with their cry and with these faces.⁷ It is at this point that for Gutiérrez the

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- 2 K. T. Kelly, *New Directions in Moral Theology: The Challenge of Being Human*, London, 1992, p. 130.
 - 3 G. Gutiérrez, *The Density of the Present: Selected Writings*, New York, 1999, pp. 160-161.
 - 4 G. Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, New York, 1997, pp. xiv-xvii., G. Gutiérrez, "How Can God be Discussed from the Perspective of Ayacucho," in *Concilium* 1 (1990) 103-113.
 - 5 G. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, trans., R. R. Barr, New York, 1983, p. 57, 92.
 - 6 G. Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans., R. R. Barr, New York, 1993, pp. 67-69.
 - 7 G. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, trans., M. O'Connell, New York, 1991, pp. 116-117.

theological and epistemological role of the experience of human suffering in the socio-political context offers chances for the renewal of Christian social ethics. The common people's interests are seen here to be more focused on the proximity of life's immediate demands. It is an interruption of the experience of human suffering.

This is an attempt to carry out such an investigation viewing social morality as a good seeking activity with regard to both the individual and community. It is our conviction that the political vision of Gutiérrez has an immense liberative potential for doing justice to the aspirations of the present context of our country. It has the power and liberating potential to transform human attitudes and actions. It can also function as a prophetic critique of those ideologies and structures of domination that engender inhuman suffering.

Gutiérrez's liberation project is a response to the present crisis of increasing fragmentation of rationality and the exclusion of subjective and value-laden elements of the understanding of social and political life today, specifically in the developing countries. It is an attempt to establish a clear and critical understanding of the links between Christian faith and socio-political praxis.⁸ He seeks to realise this aim by developing theology in a way that is deeply conscious of our human role as makers of society and history, inspired by the divine mystery. One of the distinctive marks of his liberation project is that it moves deliberately away from the rigidly theoretical forms of dogmatic orthodoxy, and it goes beyond the concerns of transcendental theology. He defines his liberation project as a praxis-centred theology, which begins from an acute awareness of its own particular historical and cultural experience.⁹

The liberation project suggested by Gutiérrez arises from the transforming social praxis of communities of poor people in the developing countries. It confronts the world community with a direct

8 G. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, p. 51.

9 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans., C. Inda & J. Eagleson, New York, 1st 1974, pp.11-13.

10 G. Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, trans., M. O'Connell, New York, 1984, pp. 124-125.

ethical claim.¹⁰ In these respects, his liberation project offers a fruitful starting point for a theology which seeks to overcome the crisis of privatisation and to initiate a discursive Christian praxis in the public sphere. It addresses the Christian community from the periphery by providing a unique insight into the insufficiency of the present relationship between faith and our socio-political life.¹¹ The relationship between faith and responsible political life is not secondary but primary. The transforming social praxis of Christians is understood as unfinished and insufficient for the final healing of our world. This task is fulfilled in the light of an eschatological faith that awaits the final coming of the Kingdom of God.¹² Our hope for a divinely promised salvation does not alienate us from the ordinary struggle for liberation and justice.

Gutiérrez's liberation project has consequences for contemporary ethical reflection. It paves the way for contextual theologians consciously to consider various contexts in their reflections, and to re-envision theological methodology accordingly. In doing so, contemporary theology turns to ordinary human experience of suffering and attempts to name the negative experience of grace within them. In this process Gutiérrez points to new areas of human experience of suffering overlooked in the past. He gives new accents on what was perhaps quickly glossed over, he points to new symbols, new mediations, and new contexts that have given rise to new questions, and theological and ethical formulations. His theological conviction was complemented and developed by his increased post-Vatican II sensitivity to a world-historical consciousness. It is most fitting to characterize his liberation project as an ethic of ordinary life experience and of ordinary experience of grace. It is the current experience of faith that urges traditional interpretations to renew, in order for tradition to be a living tradition. Interpretation learns from experience. For him, community is the birthplace of the self. Community and the self are not primarily to be thought of as concepts, but as social and practical human realities. Thus, what is human is

11 G. Gutiérrez, *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year*, New York, 1997, p.38.

12 G. Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, trans., M. O' Connel, New York, 1990, pp. 35-36.

13 G. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, p. 47

also necessarily political in nature.¹³ He makes it clear that socio-political experiences cannot be neglected in theological explorations of what it means to be human. The credibility and relevance of Christian faith emerges only in the experience of the faithful, and this always is in relation to the context. The interplay of experience and interpretation constitutes the liberation project of Gutiérrez.

2. Politics: Theological Foundations

2.1. *History as the Locus of God's Self-disclosure*

For Gutiérrez, Jesus Christ is the liberator whose saving action embraces all levels of human existence. His liberating activity cannot be reduced only to the religious dimension of life. It touches the basic structure of personal and political life. Through Jesus Christ salvation is present at the heart of human history. God is revealed not only in biblical times, but also in the world today, in the struggles of the oppressed to liberate themselves from inhuman situations. This situation is not new, but an age-old problem that has been understood from different perspectives in the past. Gutiérrez constructs an alternative theological and ethical interpretation of these situations of oppression. He distinguishes his position from those that have served theologians former times. The victims of this situation proclaim a God who liberates and gives life through the experience of their death.¹⁴ In the context of secularisation, he observes that there is a growing sensitiveness to a God who is revealed in humility and suffering. For example, J. B. Metz looks back into the dangerous memory of Jesus to understand the reality of God in history. For him, the memory of the Christian is, above all, the memory of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is that dangerous memory which is most dangerous for those who presume to make his/her memory their own.¹⁵

Gutiérrez finds new forms to render alive his hope in the God of concrete history. The details narrated by the first Christian communities, namely, the biblical narratives regarding the ministry and message, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth remain in

14 G. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, p. xii.

15 J. B. Metz, "The Future in the Memory of Suffering," in *Concilium* 6 (1972) 9-25, pp. 21-22.

concrete history. The God of history, who is revealed as love and life in the bible, is a mystery. God is love that embraces all things. God is someone who self-manifests within history and at the same time, is present in the heart of each individual.¹⁶ He reminds us that the faith experience of the poor and the oppressed that bursts into our lives and our theology is the vital context, the historical and social setting for a reflection on the God of biblical revelation.¹⁷

Gutiérrez's reflections on the God of history, revealed and manifest in the bible, lead us to concrete life situations of suffering, evil, oppression, injustice etc. that are in the world. To join in solidarity with them is an immediate ethical response.¹⁸ History as the *locus* of God's action is to be understood as the focus of God's self-disclosure in the survival, struggle and conflict of the oppressed and forgotten people. God is present in history and acts in history through the realization of his Kingdom by wo/man. But he does not completely identify this Kingdom with temporal progress. "We cannot confuse a historical reality, whether political or religious, with the Kingdom of God."¹⁹ No historical place is capable of fully containing God. Nobody can fix limits to God's presence and activity in the world.²⁰ Although God is self-disclosed at the heart of history, His presence is given in a hidden form. God is within human history in its tensions, advances, and conflicts.²¹ To find God, humans have to search. This search is a deep spiritual theme in any journey to God. God makes Himself present through those who are absent in history. "Living in the presence of the God of our life means walking shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters, especially with those who are denied their most basic rights."²²

16 G. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, p. xiii.

17 G. Gutiérrez, *The God of Life*, p. xiii.

18 G. Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p.128.

19 G. Gutiérrez, *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year*, New York, 1997, p.46.

20 A. Nova, *The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutiérrez*, New York, 2001, p.107.

21 A. Nova, *The Mystical and Prophetic Thought of Simone Weil and Gustavo Gutiérrez*, p.134.

22 G. Gutiérrez, *Sharing the Word through the Liturgical Year*, p. 41.

2.2. *Divine Human Partnership in History*

Gutiérrez's basic assumption is that humanity's encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ concretely takes place in human history. God is encountered in history because God is irreversibly committed to human history in Christ.²³ Christ is the point of encounter of God and the human person in history within divine plan. It follows that to believe in God and to encounter God in history through the other are intrinsically linked.²⁴ Hence, through the actions for justice and freedom, one can discover God as the God of life. Hence the transformation of structures that oppress the poor and exclude them from the society calls Christians to assume a historical responsibility. It is an invitation to and a demonstration of an egalitarian fraternal social order, and as a word of promise and hope for the radical renewal of humankind. It is from this base that he points out the insufficiency of both a purely spiritual or secular view of salvation, and he stresses the dimensions of faith and concrete commitment to the demands of God's justice.²⁵

2.3. *Human Self-Creation in History*

In creation God has entrusted the world to humans to transform it through their labour. Consequently, there is an essential relationship between the transformation of the world and human self-realisation. Gutiérrez rejects the notion of deterministic evolution or chance in history. His dynamic notion of history is rooted in transcendence. He formulates a sound Christian theological understanding of the notion of history. Human beings were not only the centre but also the masters of creation and they were called to continue it through labour.²⁶ He emphasises the need and the place for human active participation in the building up of society. By working, transforming the world, breaking out of servitude, building a just society, and assuming its destiny in history, humankind forges itself. By transforming the earth, one

23 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974, pp. 71-74.

24 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974, p.74.

25 G. Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, pp. 132-133.

26 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 90.

becomes co-creator with God. The transformation of the world through labour is a God-given right and duty of all persons. He has an anthropocentric understanding of creation, typical of modernity. It is precisely this liberating and mediating role of human self-creation in history that can establish an inner link between creation and salvation.²⁷ The human person has the power to mould and fashion the conditions of his/her surroundings and of the past and in this way in turn to form a pattern for the future.²⁸ B. Häring argues that it is the divine-human dialogue, which gives history its dynamic power that has reached its climax in the incarnation. This deep dimension of history is transcended in an incomprehensible way through the entry of the word of God into history, through the incarnation.²⁹

2.4. *Historical Present: Continuous Eschatology*

The history of salvation is the very heart of human history.³⁰ Gutiérrez demolishes the dualism, which separates grace from human existence and limits salvation to a supernatural order. Drawing inspiration from Rahner,³¹ Gutiérrez argues that there is no aspect of human existence that escapes God's grace, at least, as an offer.³² It is difficult to indicate the boundaries between grace and nature. There is no purely natural human fulfillment. Human beings have only one real destiny, communion with God and with other human beings. From this perspective, he contemplates the ultimate meaning and validity of human efforts for a better world.³³ He points out that until recently humanity mainly accepted the social order as something pre-given with nature. Gutiérrez's argument is that since human beings are essentially corporeal, we cannot make a Christian eschatology based

27 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 90, 101.

28 B. Häring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. p. 88.

29 B. Häring, *The Law of Christ*, Vol. p. 89.

30 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974, p.153.

31 K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans., W.V Dych, New York, 1978, p. 273, 444.

32 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 104.

33 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974, 81-131.. K. Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 273, 444.

on the immortality of the soul alone. Human beings are essentially historical and social. The eschatology of the individual should necessarily fit within the collective eschatology of humanity and the whole world. The moral goodness consists not simply in one's interior intention but also in the concrete historical praxis.

Rahner teaches that human beings do not know anything about the conditions of a final unity with God in God's own sphere of reality. But one has to say something, and it should be consistent with the theology that is thematized in the present historical situation.³⁴ Gutiérrez believes that Christ's grace is available to all human beings and the criterion for salvation is love. That means the one who loves is the one who is saved; or the one who enters into communion with others is the one who enters into communion with God.³⁵ This means that salvation occurs not simply in the Church and in heaven but in the heart of history, in the praxis of love. One looks then to this world, and sees in the world beyond, not the 'true life', rather the transformation and full realisation of the present life.³⁶

Gutiérrez's arguments are based on the conviction of a continuous eschatology, which would deal with the continuity between the exercise of freedom in this world and the final state of things. There is a sound reason which encourages a continuous eschatology in contrast to a discontinuity between this world and what is accomplished in it on the one side and a final reality which is created totally new by God, on the other side. If there is no continuity between the works of human freedom and the final Kingdom of God, the creativity of human freedom in this world amounts to nothing. It seems to contradict the very creation by God of human freedom. It can also question God's continuous sustaining and saving power, which opens the possibility to create new things in the power of love. Christian experience of God does not devalue human project. The encounter with God in Jesus Christ entails recognition that God so values human existence

34 K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, pp. 323-346.

35 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, pp. 104- 109.

36 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 85.

that God enters into a loving dialogue with it.³⁷ All creation and human beings in it amount to something real. A continuous eschatology gives a new dimension of ultimacy and seriousness to human existence and the exercise of human freedom. Human beings can contribute to the material of the final Kingdom of God. That which human beings accomplish in love will make up the substance of the Kingdom of God. Segundo observes that what is given to human freedom to do, and is not done, will be made up by God. It is an entailment of God's gift of human freedom and of God's effective presence for human salvation that releases freedom in creativity.³⁸

The conclusion which Gutiérrez arrives at is that the human person is absolutely valuable; human history and the commitments of human freedom in it are absolutely serious. God acts in and through acts for human promotion. Hence all of creation, the full range of human behaviours, the ordinary and everyday relationships are all the full stuff of salvation. Religious salvation is not an escape from history but is mediated by engagement in history.³⁹ Schillebeeckx observes that when the separation between creation and salvation is broken down, one will be able to see the whole life as sustained by one and the same God, both by His creative and in His salvific love and power. He believes that religions and churches are not salvation, but rather contexts in which and through which people become explicitly aware of God's saving activity in the whole of creation. Moreover, the uniqueness of Christianity is found in the ways that the followers of Jesus continue to actualise the history and memory of Jesus' praxis of the Kingdom, that is, the very being of God as salvation of men and women.⁴⁰ God's universal salvific intention for creation is realised whenever and wherever evil is resisted and good is furthered.

37 G. Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*, p. 35.

38 J. L. Segundo, *The Humanist Christology of Paul*, New York, 1986, pp. 123-125.

39 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 88.

40 E. Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us: The Gospel Proclaimed*, trans., J. Bowden, New York, 1983, pp. 91-102. E. Schillebeeckx, *The Church: The Human Story of God*, trans., J. Bowden, New York, 1990, pp. 66-99, 179-86.

3. Gutiérrez and European Political Theology

After Vatican II and the Medellín conference, the theological school of political theology developed in Germany had an influence on Gutiérrez.⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann and J.B. Metz developed political theology as a critical correction to the then existing mainstream Catholic theology. Political theology is primarily opposed to privatized religion, having not much contact with the social life of the people. J.B. Metz argues that the transcendental⁴² and idealist approaches to Christianity do not take history with all its contradictions, antagonisms, struggles and sufferings, and conflicts of history.⁴³ By appropriating the individual moral praxis of Kant, enlightened by the primacy of practical reason, and Marx's radical call for a new social praxis, Metz proposes a creative social praxis, which he calls Christian praxis. Christian praxis must be concerned not only with wo/man's state as a subject in the presence of God but also with the fact that wo/men can become subjects and live as subjects rising from misery and oppression.⁴⁴ Metz's political theology pointed out the dangers of an optimistic view of history and the centrality of the memory of suffering in history as a category to interpret and envisage the future. For him, history is primarily the stage of action and progress but by contrast, the stage of unredeemed suffering becomes the history's hermeneutical criterion and judge.

In 1964 Jürgen Moltmann published his *Theology of Hope*.⁴⁵ Moltmann felt that the existing Christian theology was not able to cope with the problems raised by World War II and the experiences

41 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p.222.

42 Transcendental method was developed for the first time by the German philosopher Kant (1774-1804) It takes its point of departure in the spontaneity and creativity of human knowledge, a spontaneity which is also called transcendental. By 'transcendental' we mean that which pertains to the conditions of knowledge and by 'transcendent' we mean that which pertains to God's non-creatureliness.

43 J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, p.163.

44 J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, p. 53.

45 J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans., W. Leitch, New York, 1967.

of concentration camps in Europe. It was a time of cruel experience of depressions, dictatorships, genocide and concentration camps. In spite of these historical events, the existing theology was less concerned with the acute social problems and the enormous social suffering. Considering the inadequacy of a privatised theology, which made sharp distinction between religion and both politics and social ethics, Metz introduced the term political theology and Moltmann joined him to develop that theology further.⁴⁶ The political theology of Moltmann and Metz influenced the theology of Gutiérrez in particular. Metz underscored the importance of the de-privatization of the faith and reacted to a trend at a time when both religion and religious life were separated from both social and political life.

It is not surprising that there are some parallels between political theology and the liberation project of Gutiérrez. Political theologians and Gutiérrez believe that there is an intimate relationship between Christian religion and socio-political life and that the gospel has a social message for the creation of a new socio-political order. Both believe that the theologies of transcendental, existential and personalist orientation developed in the post World War II period was insufficient to meet socio-politicizations of Christian religion. The social and political dimension of Christian religion was not given due importance. The Christian message was privatised and the praxis of faith reduced to a personal, private matter. By such an approach Christian religion is reduced to a strictly personal affair, a private situation in which wo/men make their decisions without any relevance to the socio-political realm in which wo/men live.⁴⁷

46 J. B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans., W. Glen-Doepel, New York, 1969. J. B. Metz, "The Church's Social Function in the Light of the Political Theology," in *Concilium*, 4, 6 (1968), 3-11, pp. 3-7., J. B. Metz, "The Church and the World," in T. P. Burke (ed.), *The Word in History*, New York, 1966, 69-85, pp. 80-84.

47 J. B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, pp.108-109. J. B. Metz, "Political Theology: A New Paradigm of Theology" in L. S. Rouner (ed.), *Civil Religion and Political Theology*, Notre Dame, 1986, 141-153, pp.143-147., J. B. Metz, "Prophetic Authority," in J. B. Metz (et al), *Religion and Political Society*, trans., D. Smith, London, 1974, 174-209, pp.180-190.

Gutiérrez is deeply aware that the Christian community is called to de-ideologize the Christian gospel, which has been so much privatised in history and there is a deep correlation between Christian theology and political praxis. Gutiérrez and political theologians point out that the integral liberation and happiness of contemporary wo/man are decided in the main by socio-political decisions. Hence, they think that theologians should have a concern to recognize social relevance for the Christian message and to construct a theology of the world, which challenges faith.⁴⁸ The critique of Metz and Moltmann in relating faith to politics was an inspiration for Gutiérrez to undertake a similar critique of theology in the context of painful social reality. The new political theology represents, nevertheless, a fertile effort to think the faith through. It takes into consideration the political dimension of the faith and is indeed aware of the most pervasive and acute problems encountered by today's wo/man. It also represents an original recasting of the question of the function of the Church in the world today.⁴⁹ It is mainly from these political theologians, Metz and Moltmann, that Gutiérrez got much inspiration for the theory—praxis issue, as being the fundamental hermeneutical problem in his understanding of theology.⁵⁰

Gutiérrez remains indebted to political theology and he recognizes it as one of his theoretical sources. At the same time he points out the limitations of Moltmann's theology of Hope. He writes: the hope which overcomes death must be rooted in the heart of historical praxis; if this hope does not shape the presence to lead it forward, it will be only an evasion, a futuristic illusion. One must be extremely careful

48 J. B. METZ, *Theology of the World*, p.108-109. , J. B. Metz, "The Church and the World," in *The Word in History*, T. P Burke (ed.), New York 1966, 69-85, pp.70-74..J. B. Metz, "The Church's Social function in the Light of Political Theology," in *Concilium* 4, 6 (1968), 3-11, pp. 4-8.

49 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st1974, p. 225. G. Gutiérrez, "Notes for a Theology of Liberation," in *Theological Studies* 31, 2 (1970) 243-261, p. 258.

50 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st1974, pp.220-225.. G. Gutiérrez, "The Liberation Movements and Theology," in *Concilium* 93 (1974) 135-146, pp.138-143.

not to replace a Christianity of the Beyond with a Christianity of the Future; if the former tended to forget the world, the latter runs the risk of neglecting a miserable and unjust present and the struggle for liberation.⁵¹ Gutiérrez is of the opinion that political theology is not well rooted in the present historical movements. For him, the political mediation of theology will not be genuine without a concrete social analysis as a starting point. Praxis remains an abstract concept, if there is a failure to analyze the economic, social, and political factors. Political theology fails to establish criteria for either social analysis or social change. Any positive social commitment demands both experiential engagements in the conflicts and struggles of society and a greater employment of the data provided by social analysis. Moreover, due to the lack of experiential engagement in the real conflicts of society, the mechanisms of injustice and oppression in society, for Gutiérrez, even the social critique and finally the process of de-privatisation of the faith by the political theologians remain abstract and vague.⁵² He refers to Metz's inability to grasp the situation of dependency and injustice in which humanity finds itself. Faith, the gospel and the church have a complex public dimension, which have favored the *status quo*. Speaking about the privatization of the faith simply undermines the problem.⁵³ But regardless of its limitations, political theology of Metz made a significant contribution to the liberation project of Gutiérrez.

4. Political Dimension of Christian Faith

To analyse Gutiérrez's views on the political dimension of Christian faith, one should know what Gutiérrez means by the term 'political'. For him, the term 'political' has two meanings: a broader and more inclusive, and a narrow and more specific. The broader use of the term 'political' points to the construction of the society in which people

51 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974, p. 218. G. Gutiérrez, "The Poor in the Church," in *Concilium* 104 (1977) 11-16, pp. 13-14.

52 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974 ed. pp. 224-225. G. Gutiérrez, "Faith as Freedom: Solidarity with the Alienated and Confidence in the Future," in *Horizons* 2 (1975) 25-60, pp. 31-32.

53 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1st 1974, pp. 224.

live in solidarity.⁵⁴ It is a sphere for the exercise of a critical freedom. It is the universal determinant and the collective arena for human fulfilment.⁵⁵ It is a field in which a person emerges as a free and responsible being, as a person in relationship with other persons, as someone who takes on a historical task.⁵⁶ Politics is a way to exercise the emancipation and freedom through which human beings actualises their own potentialities and can be free agents of their own destiny, inspired by the divine mystery.

'Political' in a narrow sense has to be understood as an orientation to power and this implies a particular party, particular political policy, and particular ways and means to realise the political ideals. "The word 'political' therefore must not be understood exclusively in its second meaning, which brings specific techniques into play and implies the choice of a party. Only the broad meaning allows us to say, for example, that in the historical life of a human being nothing lies outside the political sphere understood in this way. Everything has a political colour."⁵⁷ Thus Gutiérrez uses the term 'political' in a qualified way in his theology.⁵⁸ He argues that our existence has a political dimension. It is always in a socio-political fabric, and never outside of it, that a person emerges as a free and responsible being. Within the socio-political framework, one grows as a person in relationship with other people and takes on a historical task. Personal relationships acquire an ever-increasing political dimension. Those who commit themselves to the liberation process see politics as a dimension that embraces and conditions every area of human life and activity. The Puebla document also underscores the political dimension of human life. "The political dimension is a constitutive dimension of human beings and a

54 G. Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, pp.129-130.

55 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 30. A. K. Min. "The Vatican, Marxism, and Liberation Theology," pp. 439-443.

56 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 31.

57 G. Gutiérrez, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, p. 130.

58 Congregation for the Doctrine of The Faith. "Ten Observations on the Theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez" in A. T. Hennelly (ed.), *Liberation Theology*, pp. 348-350.

relevant area of social life. It has an all-embracing aspect because its aim is the common welfare of society.”⁵⁹

J. B. Metz holds that theology should place faith again in interaction with the society, and its political nature. For Metz, this is a new relationship between religion and society, between church and societal publicness, between eschatological faith and societal life.⁶⁰ This new relationship has to be maintained through critical and liberating force contained in the message of Christ. It presupposes a dialectical process between faith and reason. But at the same time, Gutiérrez believes that this dialectical process should not lead to politico-religious messiahism, which does not sufficiently respect either the autonomy of the political or that which belongs to the authentic faith.⁶¹ The political dimension of faith has an undeniable duty to get involved in the construction of the society. Faith and political action are not inseparable. They should creatively interact with each other.

To have an impact for the articulation of faith experiences on public life, it must make use of the mediation of politics, in the broader sense of the term.⁶² Hugo Assmann argues that the political dimension of faith is not something added to the normal content of faith but it is the very act of faith in a particular historical context.⁶³ For him, the political dimension of faith means that faith's basic tenets, i.e., redemption, grace, sin, salvation and so on get immersed into the fullness of the historical process. The Puebla document teaches: “the need for the church's presence into the political sphere flows from the very core of the Christian faith, from the Lordship of Christ over the whole of life.”⁶⁴ This document criticises those who do not accept that politics

59 Puebla, ‘On Evangelization, Liberation, and Human promotion: Evangelization, Ideologies and Politics,’ no.52, in *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, ed. A. Hennelly, New York 1990, p. 241.

60 J. B. Metz, ‘The Church's Social Function in the Light of a Political Theology,’ in *Concilium* 36 (1968) 3-10, p. 3.

61 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p.138.

62 A. Fierro, *The Militant Gospel*, p. 28-33.

63 H. Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, New York, 1976, p. 31.,
H. Assmann, *Theology for a Nomad Church*, p. 149.

64 J. Eagleson & P. Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, no. 515.

is a proper sphere of the evangelisation of the Church. "The Church criticises those who would restrict the scope of faith to personal or family life; who would exclude professional, economic, social, and political orders as sin, love, prayer, and pardon had no relevance in them."⁶⁵

It is clear from all these that Gutiérrez does not politicize faith but speaks about the political dimension of Christian faith.⁶⁶ Gutiérrez thinks that the political sphere is an area of freedom. The human person in solidarity with others is the sole agent of his destiny. The citizens should take up their responsibility to build their society. The political order is not something pre given or prefabricated. Every political order is preceded by human freedom and human freedom acts upon an existing political order and modifies it. Gutiérrez contends that from the enlightenment onwards, the political history is a history of freedom. Politicization means a participative process by which woman as agent of his/her own destiny consciously and freely constructs a qualitatively better society, inspired by the divine mystery.⁶⁷ That means, for Gutiérrez, the political dimension of faith is nothing other than the Church's response to the demands made upon it by the socio-political world in which it exists. It is a very fundamental demand for faith and that the Church cannot ignore it.⁶⁸ In this sense, 'politics' is actually the new name for culture. Viewed from this perspective, any theology that tries to reflect on Christian traditions in the context of world problems is also a "political theology." This is not to say that the Church should regard itself as a political institution.

5. Concluding Remarks

Gutiérrez's fundamental theological insights will help us to understand the relationship between the struggle for justice and the proclamation of the gospel. These insights provide the religious motivation of the Church's social and political involvement embracing

65 J. Eagleson & P. Scharper (eds.), *Puebla and Beyond*, no. 515.

66 G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, p. 127.

67 G. Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor History*, p. 47.

68 G. Gutiérrez, "Liberation praxis and Christian Faith," p. 10.

the empowerment of the poor and the promotion of justice and the defence of human rights. Therefore, the Church's political and social involvement does not mean that the Church goes beyond its proper mission. This proper mission should seriously take into account the Church's mature interruption of love in socio-political affairs. So we need a liberating evangelization which also implies fighting against all injustice and exploitation which are also found in the institutions established in the name of the Church, and actively involving ourselves in the creation of a more human and fraternal society. Now it is time to realize that the evangelizing mission must be accompanied by the social involvement of the Church in the struggle for justice and peace. This socio-political involvement flows from the gospel message that has both a social and political dimension. The Church is challenged by the negative contrast experience of our present social situation to be faithful to its mission. To use all influential means to orient the socio-political life in accordance with the Kingdom governed by the gospel values of equality fraternity and liberty. In order to build up the Kingdom, it is the moral responsibility of the Church to arrange an atmosphere conducive to human well-being and common good specifically in a pluralistic context. This effort presupposes a new political consciousness of the people and leaves aside any sort of spiritualistic and moralistic approach to the present state of structural evils. Since the liberation of the marginalized is an essential element of the gospel proclamation, the Church has no other option but to participate in the struggle for justice. It should be convincing to the whole faithful by executing immediate precautionary methods. Commitment to and the struggle for justice, will be a precondition of the credibility of the Church's mission. If we want peace, let us struggle for justice.

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Politics: Social Teachings of the Catholic Church

Varghese Ukken

Varghese Ukken, professor of moral theology at Marymatha Major Seminary, Trichur, outlines the social teachings of the church on politics. His survey the relevant documents reveals that the church wants her members to get actively involved in politics. Nonetheless, magisterial teachings on politics cannot claim exhaustiveness in terms of breadth and depth of the pertinent issues.

Introduction

Politics plays a vital role in the life of contemporary men and women. However, the number of people actively committed to different political parties is not very large. "Many say 'I am not political' or 'I am not interested in politics' because politics is commonly regarded today as power-game played by those who are principally concerned with securing office."¹ A good number of people are interested in politics only during the election time and they confine themselves to voting, probably motivated by the force of habit rather than by any strong political convictions. There are others who are least concerned about voting because they think that whoever gets elected makes no remarkable difference.²

In India, particularly in Kerala, many Christians are involved in politics. Regarding the general attitude towards lay faithful entering

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- 1 Lucas Thumma, "Role of the Laity in the Church, Politics and Human Development: FABC- CBCI Perspectives," *Indian Theological Studies*, 36 (September- 1999) 3, 237-238.
 - 2 Thumma, "Role of the Laity", 238. The Author has taken this idea from Paul Rountree Clifford, *Politics and the Christian Vision*, London, SCM Press, 1984, 1-2.

politics Dr. Edward Edezhath observes: "If a 'good' lay person enters into the political arena, very naturally eyebrows are raised and there would be serious reaction, mainly from within the Christian circles. Public life, especially politics of the day, is tainted to a very high degree. Hence this reaction to Christian involvement in politics is understandable."³ Why many Christians maintain such a skeptical attitude towards politics? Is it because politics is unappealing in itself or is it because those who enter into politics make it so? It is not easy to address these questions. In any case, it offers scope for an inquiry into the position of the church about politics.

The main purpose of this paper is to enquire into what the Church teaches about politics. In order to realize this goal we should have at least a general idea of politics. This study will confine itself to the important documents of the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Practically this study will consider the following documents: *Rerum Novarum*, *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Populorum Progressio*, *Octogesima Adveniens*, *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Christifideles Laici*, *Centesimus Annus*, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, *Deus Caritas Est* and CDF document entitled "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life."

Meaning of Politics

According to Mircea Eliade, "Politics is usually understood to refer to the accumulation, organization and utilization of power in a region, territory, or society, especially the power to govern, to decide who controls the common institutions of society and on what terms."⁴ Politics refers to the activity of the person in the state. Politics does not have any existence apart from persons involved in it. Politics is the activity of accumulating organizing and utilizing the power to govern

3 Edward Edezhath, "Lay Faithful in Public Life," *The Living Word*, 111/5 (September-October-2005) 314.

4 Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol.II, Newyork, Macmillan Library Reference, Chicago, 1995, 408.

the society or the activity of deciding who has to control the common institution of the society. It also decides on the terms of governing it. State is a moral entity or moral person, having a separate and specific existence apart from the persons in the state.

As the above given description suggests, the term politics can have a broad or narrow sense. In order to make the query precise and easy, I prefer the first meaning of politics given above, i.e., politics as the accumulation, organization and utilization of power in a region, territory or society, especially the power to govern, to decide who controls the common institutions of society and on what terms.

Politics in the Social Teachings of the Church

Rerum Novarum

Rerum Novarum is known as the *Magna Charta* of social order. This encyclical was issued by pope Leo XIII in order to propose Christian remedies to the problem encountered by the workers in the wake of the industrial revolution. This is considered the first important document on the social teachings of the church. Though we find several teachings regarding the rights and duties of the state to interfere in social problems like the problem of workers, collection of taxes, etc. (25-35), this document does not say anything about politics as such. In other words, it does not directly speak as to who has to control the common institution of society and on what terms. From the document it is evident that it is taken for granted that it is to be done by the state (Government) based on the principles of common good and welfare of the persons (26).

Quadragesimo Anno

Quadragesimo Anno, of pope Pius XI justifies and reinterprets everything taught by *Rerum Novarum* and points out Christian solutions to social problems. In this document also we do not find any direct reference to politics.

Mater et Magistra

This encyclical published by pope John XXIII highlights the social dimension of property and the necessity of effective distribution of goods in society. The ever increasing role of the state in realizing the

common good and social progress are emphasized in this document. But nothing worthy of mention regarding politics is referred to in this encyclical.

Pacem in Terris

Pope John XXIII published this encyclical a few months before his death. This is the document in which the church officially made the first declaration on human rights. "Four major themes stand out in *Pacem in Terris*: The rights proper to each individual, the relation between authority and conscience, disarmament, and the development of the common good."⁵ A detailed presentation of the rights and duties of individuals and states and among states is seen in the encyclical. These points do not directly refer to "politics" in the sense of accumulating, organizing and utilizing power by persons in the state.

Among human rights, however, this encyclical lists political rights also. It states that the right to take an active part in public affairs and to contribute one's share to the common good of the society belong to the demands of the dignity of person (*Pacem in Terris*, 21). By enlisting political rights among the human rights, the church made people aware that taking active part in public life is the right of every citizen. Contributing one's part to common good is a duty of the citizen. Taking active part in public affairs of the society, therefore, implies all the activities of citizens to accumulate, organize and to utilize the power to govern the common causes of the society, in one word 'politics.' Thus we may argue that the Catholic Church teaches that politics is simultaneously a right and a duty of all citizens.

Gaudium et Spes

Gaudium et Spes, one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council, plays an unquestionable role in the realm of social teachings of the Catholic Church, since it makes "an attempt to read the signs of the times so that the church can articulate its best hopes for humanity."⁶

5 David J. O' Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 2003, 129.

6 David J. O' Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought*, 164.

Gaudium et Spes has set apart a few paragraphs to deal with the political community in general. And in particular themes such as modern public life, nature and purpose of the political community, participation by all in public life and political community and the church are discussed. The pertinent points directly connected with our subject matter are given below.

There should be politico-juridical structures providing all citizens without any distinction with ever improving and effective opportunities to play an active part in the establishment of the juridical foundations of the political community, in the administration of the public affairs in determining the aims and terms of reference of public bodies, and in the election of political leaders. Every citizen ought to be mindful of his rights and his duty to promote the common good by using his vote. The church praises and esteems those who devote themselves to the public good for the service of the people and take upon themselves the burdens of public office (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75).

The appreciation and positive attitude of the church regarding politics are evident from the following statement: "Christians must be conscious of their specific and proper role in the political community. They should be shining examples by their sense of responsibility and their dedication to the common good. They should recognize the legitimacy of differing points of view about the organization of worldly affairs and show respect for their fellow citizens, who even in association defend their opinion by legitimate means" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75). Through these guidelines the church appreciates politics as the right of citizens.

The obligatory dimension of involvement in politics is explicit in the following text: "So that all citizens will be able to play their part in political affairs, civil and political education is usually necessary for the population as a whole and for young people in particular and must be diligently attended to. Those with a talent for the difficult yet noble art of politics or whose talents in this matter can be developed should prepare themselves for it, and forgetting their own convenience and material interests, they should engage in political activity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 75).

From the above given account, we may draw four conclusions:

- a) Active participation in public life implies playing active role in politics.
- b) Playing an active part in politics is consonant with the dignity and nature of the human person.
- c) Citizens have the right and duty to express one's political will, at least by using his vote. Obviously this presumes a democratic structure of politics.
- d) The Catholic Church has high esteem towards politics and persons involved in it.

Populorum Progressio

Populorum Progressio issued by Pope Paul VI mainly deals with the relationship between the rich and the poor nations. Through this encyclical the church asserted again that she is really interested in the integral development of all peoples. For Paul VI, development is the new face of peace (*Populorum Progressio*, 76-80). It is true that working for the integral development of peoples inevitably demands active participation in politics. No one can think of integral development of a nation without politics. Despite this strong correlation between development and politics, we do not find *Populorum Progressio* developing the theme of politics.

Octogesima Adveniens

Pope Paul VI after participating in the general body meeting of the bishops of Latin America, published this apostolic letter to exhort people to put into practice the social teachings of the church taking into consideration the particular needs and circumstances of each nation. This document gives relevant contributions to the subject matter of this paper. "It is true that as regards the term "politics" many confusions are possible and must be clarified, but every one feels that in the social and economic field, both national and international, ultimate decisions rest with political power" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 46). Through this statement, the pope made it clear that in the term politics lot of confusions are possible and therefore it has to be clarified and interpreted. The importance of political power also is recognized here.

After indicating the importance of politics and the need of clarifying the term “politics”, the pope explains the term politics from a Christian perspective.

“Political power, which is the natural and necessary link for ensuring the cohesion of the social body, must have as its aim the achievement of the common good. While respecting the legitimate liberties of individuals, families and subsidiary groups, it acts in such a way as to create, effectively and for the well being of all, the conditions required for attaining man’s true and complete good, including his spiritual end. It acts within the limits of its competence, which can vary from people to people and from country to country. It always intervenes with care for justice and with devotion to the common good, for which it holds final responsibility. It does not, for all that, deprive individuals and intermediary bodies of the field of activity and responsibility which are proper to them and which lead them to collaborate in the attainment of this common good. In fact, The true aim of all social activity should be to help individual members of the social body, but never to destroy or absorb them. According to the vocation proper to it, the political power must know how to stand aside from particular interests in order to view its responsibility with regard to the good of all men, even going beyond national limits. To take politics seriously at its different levels - local, regional, national, and worldwide - is to affirm the duty of man, of every man, to recognize the concrete reality and the value of the freedom of choice that is offered to him to seek to bring about the both good of the city and of the nation and of mankind. Politics are a demanding manner - but not the only one - of living the Christian commitment to the service of others. Without of course solving every problem, it endeavors to apply solutions to the relationships men have with one another. The domain of politics is wide and comprehensive but it is not exclusive. An attitude of encroachment which would tend to set up politics as an absolute value would bring serious danger. While recognizing the autonomy of the reality of politics, Christians who are invited to take up political activity should try to make their choices consistent with the Gospel and, in the framework of a legitimate plurality, to give both person and collective witness to the seriousness of their faith the effective and disinterested service of men” (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 46).

A detailed interpretation of this passage is beyond the scope of this paper. Hence I restrict myself to indicate a few important points.

- a) For the Catholic Church politics is not an absolute value, nor is it an end in itself.
- b) Christians who actively involve in politics should try to make their choices consistent with the Gospel teachings.
- c) Achievement of the common good is the aim of politics.
- d) Politics is one of the fields among many, which demands the real living of the Christian commitment to the service of others.
- e) To take politics seriously is the duty of every person.

Laborem Exercens

Pope John Paul II published this encyclical in order to explain in detail about labour and its dignity. We know that politics and labour are interconnected. But nothing significant is mentioned about politics in this document.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis

This encyclical was published by Pope John Paul II with the intention of commemorating the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum Progressio* and to re-assure that the church is very much concerned with the welfare of the whole humankind. This document has not given any substantial contribution to the theme of politics.

Christifideles Laici

This document is the post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II. There are few ideas on politics in this document. "In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in "public life" that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good. The Synod Fathers have repeatedly affirmed that every person has a right and duty to participate in public life, albeit in a diversity and complementarity of forms, levels, tasks and responsibilities. Charges of careerism, idolatry of power, egoism

and corruption that are oftentimes directed at persons in government, parliaments the ruling classes or political parties, as well as the common opinion that participating in politics is an absolute moral danger, does not in the least justify either skepticism or an absence on the part of Christians in public life" (*Christifideles Laici*, 42).

The following points are clearly stated in this document:

- a) Participation in "public life" which implies playing an active role in politics is the right and duty of every lay faithful.
- b) Whatever be the justifications for skepticism and absence from public life (politics) from the part of any lay faithful is never appreciated.

Besides these, this document re-presents several claims already presented in *Gaudium et Spes* with regard to politics.

Centesimus Annus

As the title indicates this encyclical of Pope John Paul II was written to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. This document does not give us any valuable contribution to theme of this paper.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

In this document, published by the pontifical council *Justitia et Pax*, we find a comprehensive presentation of the social teachings of the Catholic Church. The theme "politics" is seen in numbers 565-574 of the document. This document highlights some of the main ideas found in other documents. In the pursuit of the common good this document indicates that the following guidelines are to be observed.

- a) Establishment of justice with special attention to situation of poverty and suffering.
- b) Respect the autonomy of the state.
- c) Follow the principle of subsidiarity.
- d) Promote the attitude of dialogue.
- e) Establish peace in the context of solidarity.
- f) Consider the moral dimension of the political activity.

- g) Act in conformity with one's own conscience.
- h) Cultivate a method of discernment.

Deus Caritas Est

This is the first encyclical of pope Benedict XVI. The theme of politics comes in the second part of this document. One of the important ideas on politics seen in this document is that "The just ordering of society and the state is a central responsibility of politics. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the church" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28). Unlike other documents, this document clearly brings out the distinction between the duty of the state and of the church in fulfilling the main tasks of politics, especially establishing justice in the society. It firmly asserts that establishing justice is the immediate task of the state. "Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the church's immediate responsibility" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28).

The above statement does not imply that the church has nothing to do with this political task. The document points out that the church has only an indirect task. "We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world politics, the sphere of autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 29). The reason made clear by the pope is that the church is bound to respect the autonomy of the state. "The Church cannot and must not take up on herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the state" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 29). Another, but similar argument is evident in the following statement: "Fundamental to Christianity is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God" (Mt. 22: 21), in other words, the distinction between church and state, or as the Second Vatican Council puts it, the autonomy of the temporal sphere" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28).

Regarding the obligation of the Christian faithful to play an active part in politics, this document makes a clarification, that is, the obligation falls on the faithful as citizens of state or in their personal capacity. "The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 29).

CDF Document on Politics

On 24th November 2002, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a document named "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life." Its remarks reveal the church's understanding of politics.

The document claims that politics is part of a constant teaching of the church. It says that the commitment of Christians in the world has found a variety of expressions in the course of the past 2000 years. One such expression has been Christian involvement in political life. Among the saints, the Church venerates many men and women who served God through their generous commitment to politics and government. Among these, Saint Thomas More, who was proclaimed Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, gave witness by his martyrdom to the inalienable dignity of the human conscience.

The CDF document observes that in today's democratic societies everyone is made a participant in directing the body politic. Such societies call for new and fuller forms of participation in public life by Christian and non-Christian citizens alike. Indeed, all can contribute, by voting in elections for lawmakers and government officials, and in other ways as well, to the development of political solutions and legislative choices which will benefit the common good. The life of a democracy could not be productive without the active, responsible and generous involvement of everyone. The church wants every Christian to take an active role in politics.

The CDF text holds that by fulfilling their civic duties, guided by a Christian conscience in conformity with its values, the lay faithful exercise their proper task of infusing the temporal order with Christian values. They have to do this by respecting the nature and rightful autonomy of political order and cooperating with other citizens according to their particular competence and responsibility. The document cites pope John Paul II: "the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'public life', that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good" (*Christifideles laici*, 42). This would include the promotion and defense of goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and for the environment, justice and solidarity (no. 1).

The document admits that on the level of concrete political action, there can generally be a plurality of political parties in which Catholics may exercise their right and duty to contribute to the public life of their country. This occurs because of the contingent nature of certain choices regarding the ordering of society, the variety of strategies available for accomplishing or guaranteeing the same fundamental value, the possibility of different interpretations of the basic principles of political theory, the technical complexity of many political problems and other reasons. The legitimate plurality of temporal options is at the origin of the commitment of Catholics to politics and relates directly to Christian moral and social teaching. It is in the light of this teaching that lay Catholics must assess their participation in political life so as to be sure that it is marked by a coherent responsibility for temporal reality.

The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human *person*. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle, for otherwise the witness of the Christian faith in the world, as well as the unity and interior coherence of the faithful, would be non-existent. The democratic structures on which the modern state is based would be quite fragile were its foundation

not the centrality of the human person. It is respect for the person that makes democratic participation possible. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, the protection of «the rights of the person is, indeed, a necessary condition for citizens, individually and collectively, to play an active part in public life and administration” (*Gaudium et spes*, 73).

When political activity turns against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation, Catholics have special commitment and responsibility. In the face of fundamental and inalienable ethical demands, Christians must recognize that what is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person. For instance, the document suggests the case of laws concerning abortion and euthanasia. Such laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death. In the same way, the duty to respect and protect the rights of the human embryo. Analogously, the family needs to be safeguarded and promoted, based on monogamous marriage between a man and a woman, and protected in its unity and stability in the face of modern laws on divorce, nor can they receive legal recognition as such. The same is true for the freedom of parents regarding the education of their children; it is an inalienable right recognized also by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In the same way, one must consider society’s protection of minors and freedom from modern forms of slavery such as drug abuse and prostitution. In addition, there is the right to religious freedom and the development of an economy that is at the service of the human person and of the common good, with respect for social justice, the principles of human solidarity and subsidiarity, according to which “the rights of all individuals, families, and organizations and their practical implementation must be acknowledged” (GS 75). The text also mentions the question of peace. Certain pacifist and ideological visions tend at times to secularize the value of peace, while, in other cases, there is the problem of summary ethical judgments which forget the complexity of the issues involved. Peace is always “the work of justice and the effect of charity” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2304). It demands the absolute and radical rejection of violence and terrorism and requires

a constant and vigilant commitment on the part of all political leaders (no. 4).

The CDF text refers to the warnings given by John Paul II about the dangers which follow from confusion between the religious and political spheres. "Extremely sensitive situations arise when a specifically religious norm becomes or tends to become the law of a state without due consideration for the distinction between the domains proper to religion and political society. In practice, the identification of religious law with civil law can stifle religious freedom, even going so far as to restrict or deny other inalienable human rights" (John Paul II, *Message for the 1991 World Day of Peace*: "If you want peace, respect the conscience of every person," 4: AAS 83 (1991) 414-415). All the faithful are well aware that specifically religious activities such as the profession of faith, worship, administration of sacraments, theological doctrines, interchange between religious authorities and the members of religions are outside the state's responsibility. The document wants that the recognition of civil and political rights, as well as the allocation of public services may not be made dependent upon citizens' religious convictions or activities (6).

It is also noted that there is chance for organizations founded on Catholic principles to give support to political forces or movements with positions contrary to the moral and social teaching of the church on fundamental ethical questions. Such activities are in contradiction to basic principles of Christian conscience (7).

Conclusions

Many of the documents we considered do not mention anything relevant to the theme of this paper. It seems that politics has not been given as extensive and important treatment as other themes in church teachings.

Theological basis for taking active part in politics is not sufficiently developed in the documents. Hence it is still a due in theological field.

A clear and comprehensive definition of "politics" is to be developed.

The church maintains a positive attitude towards politics.

The church does not like to be identified with any political community or party, because she likes to keep a position which transcends politics.

The assertion of the church that the aim of politics is the common good of the society which implies the integral development of peoples, the place given to the dignity of human person, establishment of peace and justice in the world etc., are praise worthy. This indicates that when the church inspires the faithful to actively participate in politics, she shall not have any vested interest like material benefit, or political clouts for a group of faithful or for the whole church. It is only to serve the common good of the society.

The explicit vision of the Church that all the faithful have right and duty to take active part in politics can be recognized as an invaluable contribution to the world.

The Church has already brought out a few teachings on politics. I think that in the practical field of politics, the presence and influence of the church are not felt as they ought to be. The church has to move forward from conceptual level to political praxis. It does not mean that she has to enter active politics or side with any party, rather she has to transpose the gospel values into politics.

It is high time for the Church to find out the new ways and means to inspire the people to enter politics to attain its real goals, that is, the common good of the society.

The Church has a prophetic role to play in politics. At present politics in several countries have become puppets in the hands of the so-called full-time politicians who work to attain the goal of their respective political parties. They give always priority to the goal of their party. They may not even consider the common good of the society as relevant in their political activity. If the church does not play her prophetic role by finding out new ways and means to manifest her presence and influence, the practical field of politics (not of any political party) may be overcome by politicians with vested interests. This situation will certainly endanger the common good of the society. Even if the church has to undergo hard moments in this strenuous

task, she has to safeguard the common good of the society, without which, in my view, the task of establishing the kingdom of heaven will be incomplete. By actively involving in the practical field of politics church has to convince the people that it is possible for anybody to be very active in politics.

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Church and Politics

Mathew Illathuparampil

Mathew Illathuparampil teaches moral theology at St. Joseph Pontifical Seminary Mangalapuzha. In this essay he tries to outline various aspects of church-politics relationship and strongly argues that the church cannot be a passive spectator of politics on account of theological grounds.

Confluence of church and politics is often condemned in terms of the much-deplored politicization of religion. There is a tacit agreement among church-persons as well as among politicians that the church should not enter into politics and politics should not intervene in the life of the church. This is quite understandable, given the dangerous outcomes it may produce. However, politicization of religion continues to take place under different guise, especially in India.¹ The Catholic Church on her part is on guard, especially in the contemporary context, that party politics shall not divide the faith community. The church does not want to get involved in party politics, as it may deepen divisions in the society. For example, John Paul II said, "In the midst of our people we are not experts in politics and economics, we are not leaders with regard to any temporal enterprise, but ministers of the gospel."² The same thing was repeated in his message to CELAM. Politicians on their part try to resist any kind of external intervention that would cost them a share of their power.

These cautions have practically led the church to overlook politics as an area of ecclesial engagement in her theology and ecclesial praxis.

- 1 It is good to recall that Machiavelli advised rulers to maintain religion as a means to keep their domain comfortable. See Ernst Feil, "Von der 'politischen Theologie' zur 'Theologie der Revolution,'" Ernst Feil and Rudolph Weth, eds., *Diskussion zur "Theologie der Revolution"* (Mainz: Kaiser and Matthias Grünewald, 1969) 122.
- 2 Address to Brazilian Bishops.

However, the church, especially in India, is on alert when certain political moves threaten her rights, particularly religious rights or that of her institutions. Otherwise, the church often leaves politics alone, purely as a secular topic. This, I must say, on the one hand, deprives the church of a golden opportunity to try to establish the kingdom of God on earth and on the other hand, condemns politics to be run by its own pragmatic mechanism. Hence, this essay calls for an active engagement of politics by the church and examines the why and how of that process. If a 'secular' motive for this attempt has to be traced, I would gladly repeat the words of the former French president, Charles De Gaulle (1890–1970), who said, "I have come to the conclusion that politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians."

Before we proceed further, let us have a working explanation of politics. Politics might be described as an ideologically based stable arrangement to address social issues and to distribute resources in view of common good. It implies that political arrangements are done by common agreements. They are not imposed on people from outside against the will of the masses. It would be naïve to call a tyrannical rule as a political arrangement in the sane sense. Rather it would be a fake political system. Political parties do serve as platforms to express common will and opinion of people. Ideological differences in principle give birth to different parties. So parties cannot exhaust political will of the people, though they do function as a means to realize political goals. When we speak about the relation between the church and politics sometimes it refers to the church's approach to and interaction with different political parties, not to politics in the abstract.

The first part of this essay addresses the question why the church should engage politics; the second part exposes the scope of such an engagement and the final part offers certain suggestions for an effective intervention of the church into politics. As a whole this work is meant to offer only some preliminary reflections.

1. Why Should the Church Engage Politics?

Mostly for historical reasons the church and theology did not engage politics heavily. The early church, until it got political freedom in the fourth century, was not in a position to consider politics. However, the early church aimed at the goals, which any political system must ensure. For example, as the Acts of the Apostles testifies, the church

tried to practice a germane form of communism (Acts 4: 34-35). It was expedient during that time, because, if Engels is right, "In its origin Christianity was a movement of the oppressed." A religion of slaves and freedmen, the poor and those deprived of rights.³ But the 'communist' social ordering did not last long, for imaginable reasons.

As the church gained political freedom, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Both the church and politics in this context functioned in close affinity, leading to a then accepted mutual self-determination. Emperor Charlemagne (724-814) called himself the head of the church. This scenario did not in fact necessitate theological reflections on the church—politics relationship. However, the notable exception to this general rule is the *City of God* by St. Augustine. But this work did not bring in themes that separated the church from politics.⁴ From 1300 onwards church and politics began to get separated. Even at this stage politics did not make itself a covetable theme of theological discussions. It was perfectly in tune with the medieval mind that the church was to engage in spiritual works. In addition to this, the church might have wanted to keep her away from the inevitable mire of politics and divisions among the faithful.

One may observe that politics was given a decent place in theology by the social teachings of the church. Though the Catholic social teachings of the universal church give relatively nominal attention to politics, local churches do give considerable place to it. Similarly politics gets significant attention in liberation theology and political theology.⁵ In any case, it must be said that in mainstream theology politics seems to get only marginal place just as ecological crisis, terrorism, feminist issues, etc. That praxis-oriented theologies were not seated on an equal par with theoretical theologies is part of the history of theology.

3 Karl Marx, *Friedrich Engels, Sur la religion* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1960) 310.

4 Rowan Williams, "Politics and the Soul: A Reading of the City of God," *Milltown Studies* 19/20 (1987) 57-58.

5 Pierre Bigo, *The Church and Third World Revolution* (New York: Orbis, 1977)., Diskussion zur "Theologie der Revolution (Mainz: Kaiser and Matthias Grünewald, 1969)., Alfredo Fierro, *The Militant Gospel: A Critical Introduction to Political Theologies*, trans. J. Drury (New York: Orbis, 1977)., Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1973).

The above given account should not create the impression that the church stood alienated from human problems and social issues. Though not under the hubris of politics, the church committed herself to social problems. But it was almost purely a charity-based approach. The church held that conversion of individuals would lead to social transformation on a large scale. We may hold that this optimism in fact spiritualised the social message of the gospels. The drawback of this stance consisted in that the church did not pay attention to the structural issues, which cannot simply be solved by the personal conversion of individuals alone.

The contemporary church, however, acknowledges the importance of politics in her mission. For instance, Paul VI was of the opinion that in economic and social questions the ultimate decision rests with politics.⁶ The Puebla document held that "as a mother and teacher whose expertise is humanity, the church must examine the conditions, systems, ideologies, and political life of our continent—shedding light on them from the standpoint of the gospel and its own social teaching."⁷ Though in indirect terms Benedict XVI also recognized the importance of politics.⁸

Having made a broad survey of the historical contours of the relationship between the church and politics, we address the basic question why the church should engage politics. It must be made clear at the outset that engaging politics does not mean the church involves with party politics. Without any hidden motives, the church can influence the business of administering political power for common good. Mostly ecclesiological reasons justify such a venture.

1. The mission of the church undoubtedly is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. His mission was to realize the kingdom of God on earth. But the kingdom, which Jesus preached cannot be reduced exclusively to this world or to the other world. Rather it is one, which begins in this world and is fulfilled in the world to come. In its effective realization it begins with the conversion of hearts, leading to

6 Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46.

7 *Puebla*, 515, 511.

8 Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est* 28, 29.

transformation of social structures. Such change of structures in terms of the gospel values is a prerequisite of the realization of the kingdom. Changing the earthly life in the pattern of the kingdom is one of the crucial missions of the church. In order to do that the church has to positively influence politics.

Engaging politics creatively is part of the church's mission. Her service inevitably takes an institutional form. For example, the church understood Jesus' command to feed the hungry as not only to give bread to them, but also to organize an economic community capable of providing bread for the hungry. Jesus' command to serve the sick also means to set up public health organizations. Jesus' command to free the prisoners also means to reform the penal system. So charitable services do take structural form for more effective and durable performance. Similarly to establish the kingdom can also mean to establish humanly dignified political structures. For, there is no single force or element that can uplift human condition as politics. If and when the church is serious about her mission to establish the kingdom, she cannot but be concerned about politics as a mission field. Briefly, the kingdom must always stand as a touchstone to social questions. As Edward Schillebeeckx says, "The hermeneutics of the kingdom of God is primarily to improve the world."⁹

2. Liberation of the oppressed was a form and sign of the salvation which Jesus offered. True, it was not the only sign of salvation. That, however, does not mitigate its place. The inaugural speech of Jesus' public ministry was couched in terms of liberation (LK 4: 18-21). Jesus presented his liberative acts as the signs of his Messiahship (Lk 7: 18-23).

If liberative acts are signs of salvation, the church has to engage in liberative praxis. It demands not only individual help in religious and spiritual ways but social, political and economic actions as well. Oppression is one of the gravest structural sins. If we restore the

9 Edward Schillebeeckx, "La théologie," in *Les catholiques hollandais* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969) 15.

biblical meaning of iniquity, collective forms of oppression can be more serious than individual sins.¹⁰ In order to address issues of oppression of various sorts, we have to make recourse to political means. For disparate attempts alone will not meet massive needs of people. Poverty cannot simply be addressed by almsgiving. We need restructuring of economic orders. Social inequalities cannot be solved by individual attempts alone; often we need legal support and measures. Development cannot be ensured by the communion of good-willed people alone. Patriarchy will not cease to exist just by feminist exhortations. Agricultural sector cannot be redeemed by local solutions alone. Ecological crisis will not just be addressed by mere personal decisions. Liberation in all these areas require social decisions supported by a strong political will, and sometimes by legal backing. Pope John XXIII understood politics as a means of fulfilling Christian other centeredness. He taught, "Politics is a demanding manner—but not the only one—of living the Christian commitment to others."¹¹

3. Ensuring common good is one of the prime concerns of Catholic social ethics. In ensuring common good, political systems have got a unique role. For example, the distribution of resources and liabilities of a nation depends on political decisions. Labor force, labor opportunities, nature, etc. come under resources; among a nation's liabilities fall healthcare services, keeping law and order and providing the infrastructure. Almost all human activities are subjected to rules in favor of common good. Business and the use of technology, for example, are not allowed absolute autonomy. They are not driven by market rules and technological rationality alone. They are subjected to political ordering. Else, unbridled use of monetary, technological, physical powers would eliminate poor people from their existence. The church does mean that human activities must be under the mature supervision of political ordering.¹² Hence, a church conscious about

10 Pierre Bigo, *The Church and Third World Revolution* (New York: Orbis, 1977) 131.

11 John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 46.

12 Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* 46.

maintaining common good must be vigilant about politics and the way in which it carries out this function with respect to values of distributive justice and social justice.

4. That politics is meant to ensure common good does not automatically entail the good of all people. Often the political system itself thwarts common good. Political power and corruption, more often than not, go together. Opposing groups in politics may unite (only) in sharing in the fruits of corruption. While admitting that there are a few exceptions, it has to be said that opportunism mars the political process in general. It is not less than a paradox that a corrupt and inefficient political system is relied on for maintaining common good. This scenario calls for the intervention of agencies that can purify and give right orientation to politics. The church can to a great extent fulfill this task.

As Johannes Baptist Metz argues, church as an institution must exercise critical liberty vis-à-vis society.¹³ The church must be able to criticize given political orderings in terms of the gospel values. All criticisms of society contain a utopian element. Utopia is a critique of reality. It establishes a space for desire. Schillebeeckx writes that "the gospel message does not furnish us with a direct, immediate program of political and social action ... the gospel indirectly does have a decisive importance in the sociopolitical realm precisely insofar as it is a utopia... Christian expectation and the Sermon on the Mount carry out the role of a real and effective utopia, continually exerting pressure on all affairs of society and politics."¹⁴ Not all theologians may agree with this claim that the gospel does provide us with a utopia. In any case, theology must constantly try to establish a relationship between Christian faith and political praxis. Metz writes, "The fundamental hermeneutical problem of theology is not really the relationship between systematic theology and history, between dogma and history, but rather the relationship between theory and practice, between the intelligent understanding of the faith and social praxis."¹⁵

13 Alfredo Fierro, *The Militant Gospel*, 15.

14 Edward Schillebeeckx, "El Magisterio y el mundo político," *Concilium* 36, 419-420.

15 J. B. Metz, "El problema de una 'teología política,'" *Concilium* 36, 390.

II Scope of Ecclesial Intervention into Politics

Naturally all politicians and most of the faithful will consider the intervention of the church into politics as an inordinate and resistible move. So the scope and the modality of the church's engaging politics must be clearly spelled out. It seems that the church can intervene into politics at least in three ways.

1. Educational Role

Politics is backed by ideas and ideologies. However, they are distorted pragmatically and seldom practiced. Voters usually assess not only the performance rating of a political party, but its ideological base also. Often parties with poor track record has been re-elected to power because of their benevolent or innocent ideological stance. This scenario opens two issues which ultimately pose a challenge to the church.

First, there is an on gong risk that politicians themselves define values and they project a value system in favor of their agenda. This is quite a dangerous situation. I believe that politicians, for example in India, have been able to secure a kind of social recognition for certain disvalues such as corruption, inefficiency and favoritism. At least they have been able to create the impression that politics cannot but tolerate these vices. That is why there is a high tolerance level of corruption in public life.

Secondly, irrespective of their political stance, all parties use and project certain values and ideas. They include development, political decency, economic growth, religious tolerance, integrity of the nation, welfare of laborers, etc. The problem is that politicians themselves define the content of these ideas. For example, think about the notion of development, which is actually a highly complex and often mutually incompatible cluster of claims. Construction of a road, reservoir, etc. need not necessarily represent sustainable development in a particular region. Lofty ideas can serve only as slogans, but need not save people on long term basis.

Given the above said risk factors, the church has to educate the masses to define political ideals, public values, moral vision and the demands of common good. Functioning as an agent of critical

reflection, the church has to inform people to choose the right policies for public life. What the church has to try to achieve is to move "from the conscience of the citizenry to the choice for policy."¹⁶

The role of the church is to challenge, criticize and relativize ideologies in the light of the gospel. But the gospel cannot be treated as an ideology. The Geneva conference of the WCC holds that "Churches have too often attached themselves to the status quo, resenting and resisting change.... Sometimes they have fallen into the theological error of identifying existing structures with an external divine order, thus overlooking the dynamic character of God as revealed in scripture...."¹⁷

2. Advocacy Role

As we have already suggested, political parties supposedly represent the will of the people. They assume power on the basis of their majority claims to people's will expressed in election results. However, political parties, even the ones in power, need not necessarily represent the majority opinion of people. They need not always try to learn people's will also. Often the policy makers of the party decide how the government should act, what policies are to be held, what solutions are to be taken to address an issue. There are a number of questions which call for responses from the perspective of the people. For example, what must be our foreign policy, how shall we deal with the failure of the agricultural sector, what must be our education policy, how shall we provide health care to the poor, etc.

The church has an advocacy role in the formation of public policies. Along with media, social activists, religious groups and naturally political parties, the church must engage in the process of the formation of policies. She must be able to propose them from the perspective of the common people. There are a number of policy issues which are often left to the discretion of political parties. For example, development,

16 J. Brian Hehir, "The Right and Competence of the Church in the American Case," John A. Coleman, ed., *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis, 1991) 66-70.

17 WCC, *Report of the Geneva Conference*, 1966, 69-72.

ecological preservation, waste management, education, foreign aid, price hike, urbanization, agricultural growth, globalization, provision of drinking water, etc. call for clear and viable policies. To our dismay parties and even governments sometimes have no policy at all about them. I suspect whether the Indian church has made any remarkable contribution to drawing up public policies on national or local levels.

The advocacy role of the church is not a passive one. It cannot be confined to 'giving' a teaching. The church has to espouse principles and proposals. Then watch how parties respond to them; in certain cases we may be able to pressurize parties, in election period, for instance. Activism in politics from the part of the church will be justified, provided it is to safeguard the common good and it is done through benign means.

3. Prophetic-witness Role

Prophetic witness to the gospel values is a crucial form of the church's engaging politics. The church has to begin it from her own ecclesial life; she must act respecting common ecclesial will as far as possible. She has to continue it by owning and practicing what she preaches; she has to complete it by resisting injustice. And for that she may have to use different means, including strikes as an ultimate means.¹⁸ Our commitment to justice and fairness should not be restricted to making abstract and too general discourse. Integrity in ecclesial life demands that we bear witness to the values we preach. In this attempt the church may have to act as a counterpoint to the existing political order and the supportive social system. It may involve open protests and even being arrested for just causes. Of course, this means taking radical steps, because prophetic denouncement of injustice might amount to opposing governments, ideologies and political parties. It will be a costly affair.

The death of Jesus points to the fate of people who bear witness to values. One may argue that Jesus' death was prompted by political motives. Only two kinds of people were crucified during Jesus' time: common criminals and political enemies. Since Jesus was not a

18 *Gaudium et Spes* 68, *Laborem Exercens* 20.

common criminal, his execution can be explained as a government action prompted by political motives. Religious factors were also there behind Jesus' death. But strictly speaking when religion exercises power over people's life and death, it becomes a political institution.¹⁹

III Conditions for Effective Intervention into Politics

The church intervention into politics would not be welcomed by any political parties. There will be opposition. But that should not lead us to withdraw from the scene, rather equip ourselves in such a way that our attempt must enjoy credibility. Given below are a few suggestions in this regard.

1. The church has to make sure that it engages politics only for the sake of common good. People of all religions must be made convinced of this approach. Otherwise, it will immediately be branded as communal intervention into politics. Communal interests should not inspire the church to negotiate with politicians. The church must appear on the scene not only when Christians and Christian institutions are under fire. Respect for human dignity must be the standard governing the responses of the church.

2. The church shall not gain favours from politics at the cost of its credibility. Not only that our goals must be spotless, but our means also must be morally warranted. A church which relies on (undue) privileges from politics sacrifices its credibility and moral power. Such church is condemned to be silent at the face of any kind of atrocity against common good.

3. The church shall ensure transparency in its approach to politics. There shall be no hidden deal with any politician, even for good ends. The church's close relationship with corrupt politicians will devour its credibility.

4. Politics is often communally charged on various levels. The selection of candidates to election bears witness to this growing tendency. Communal interests corrupt secular politics of the country. There is a lingering tendency to assign not only ministers but also

19 Alfredo Fierro, *The Militant Gospel: A Critical Introduction to Political Theologies*, trans., J. Drury (New York: Orbis, 1977) 156.

important civil offices on communal basis. The church should resist such communal tendencies and keep itself away from them. It may look initially risky. But in the long run, it will prove good. Otherwise, the church cannot stand for secularism in politics.

5. The church's engaging politics should not foster apoliticization of the society. That it is to say, it should not create the impression that we do not any more need political parties; the church will act in their place. In apoliticized societies people will slowly loose their sense of rights. Such people will soon turn to extremist groups and movements. It will also promote communalism. Hence, as far as the church is concerned, one way to purify politics is to promote laypersons to live with Christian values in politics. It is good to recall that *Gaudium et Spes* (43) has made it clear that party politics is "properly the realm of laypeople."

6. In order to make an effective engagement of politics by the church, the teaching of the church on church-politics relationship needs a renewed understanding of at least three aspects.²⁰ This is not to belittle the value of the existing teaching of the church. Rather to suggest a few areas which the church has to take into account for its further reflections.

First, regarding the nature and function of the state in different societies. True it is that the church recognises the importance of politics. For instance, Paul VI taught, "In the social and economic field, both national and international, the ultimate decision rests with the political power."²¹ There are also reflections by the church on the question of power in society, the influence of vested interests on decision-making, the close-knit alliances between the power elites, and the consequent necessity of people's power.

In spite of some statements to the contrary, the church's teaching and practice still underplay the importance of political action, especially

20 It might be interesting to recall the words of the Communist Rappoport: We don't despise your encyclicals. What we do despise is the way you disregard them." Quoted in the Collective Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of the US, January 21, 1968 (Washington D.C.: US Catholic Conference, 1968).

21 Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 46.

at the macro level. More importantly, the church still lacks a systematic understanding of the nature and function of the State. The problem is that abuses and wrong policies are too often attributed to personal selfishness and blindness. The church does not seem to take adequate notice of class interests, biases and structural issues. Political institutions have to be scientifically studied, and the influence of various socio-economic and political groups uncovered. And the impact of ideologies on the exercise of power has to be taken into account. There are the myths of the neutrality of the liberal capitalist State and the innate power of socialist regimes to protect the poor. These questions are to be studied more thoroughly to formulate a more relevant theory of State and power.

Secondly, the use of force or coercion by the state. The church documents hold that the State should look after common good. At the same time, it looks that, the church must rethink her teaching on the use of force and coercion in the light of the desperate structural needs. There can be occasions on which the social concerns of the State is seriously challenged and opposed by the rich. Think about, for example, State interventions for land reforms, urban ceilings, minimum wages, common farming, etc. Can the State resort to the use of force to get it executed? Can the State act seriously against multinationals that prey on monopoly practices? If the opinion of the majority harms the interests of the rightful minority groups, what can be done? Can the state use force to make production serve common good? Is it legitimate to employ its organizational and coercive power to fight against discrimination, communalism and caste? How much force can be used to intervene in class and other social conflicts and even to guarantee law and order? One can easily grant that the State has to use force when law and order situation is at risk. Can the same measures be applied to bring about the radical transformations urgently required in the socio-economic, political, cultural-religious, and ideological fields? One might even wonder that the church's teaching somewhat emphasizes personal initiative more than solidarity and cooperation, and freedom more than justice? Has it not even protected, in practice, the freedom of a minority of rich and powerful at the expense of the freedom of a majority of poor and voiceless? These questions need to be addressed.

Thirdly, the political organization of society has to be discussed in the light of the previous insights on socialism, the nature of the State, the need for a strong government, and the complex relationships between justice and freedom/participation. Serious questions should be raised about the fittingness of liberal democracies and dictatorships of the proletariat. Can liberal democracies control "the imperialism of money" and promote economic justice within and between nations? Why, then, do they fail radically to transform the class structures of various societies and the international trade relations, and to build a new economic order? How much do their citizens really share in decision making? Why don't they allow more participation by people instead of remaining, to a good extent, "dictatorships for the proletariat"? Are these defects mainly due to the need for a strong Government to reorganize society, or are they the result of other ideological and structural factors? What political models would respond better to today's needs?²²

Conclusion

Politics becomes unappealing to us when we limit it to petty interests of the politicians. But in fact, it is about vital questions that concern Christian faith also. They include the following: How are we going to protect the weakest among us, including the unborn children? How shall we deal with the gap between the rich and the poor? How shall we help parents to raise their children with respect to life, sound moral values? How shall we ensure education to all? How shall we combat the growing menace of terrorism and even communal trends in the society? How are we to protect the environment from pollution and destruction? How shall we distribute the resources of the country to all in an equitable manner? The number of questions abounds. These questions need answers from a faith perspective. That is why the church is supposed to engage politics.

It is true that the gospel transcends and is distinct from political ideologies. However, there is an intimate link between faith and political concerns. Reading the mind of the church from the documents of

22 John Desrochers, *The Social Teaching of the Church* (Bangalore: Centre for Social Action, 1992) 693-697.

Vatican II Avery Dulles says, "The church, rather than being a *societas perfecta* alongside the secular state, is seen as a pilgrim people, subject to the vicissitudes of history and sharing in the concerns and destiny of the whole human race (GS, 1). The church is linked to the world as the sacrament of universal unity (LG, 1), a sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person (GS, 76), a defender of authentic human rights (GS, 41). In a dynamically evolving world (GS, 4) social and political liberation pertains integrally to the process of redemption and hence is not foreign to the mission of the church.... The church's concern for human solidarity, peace and justice, therefore, is not confined to the sphere of supernatural salvation in a life beyond."²³

Can the church remain passive and just indirectly worried about politics? I think not. Bryan Hehir puts the answer succinctly: "The casuistry of keeping the church's engagement in the political order "indirect" involves an endless series of choices and distinctions. But the effort must be made precisely because the alternatives to an indirect engagement are equally unacceptable: either a politicized church or a church in retreat from human affairs. The first erodes the transcendence of the gospel; the second betrays the incarnational dimension of Christian faith."²⁴

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- 23 Avery Dulles, "The Gospel, the Church, and Politics," *Origins* 16 (1987) 641.
- 24 J. Bryan Hehir, "Church-State and Church-World: The Ecclesiological Implications," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 41 (1986) 56.

Book Reviews

Ecumenism: Unity in Diversity. By Kuncheria Pathil, C.M.I., Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2006. Pp. ix-215. Rs.150, \$11. ISBN 81-86861-93-9.

The author, professor emeritus of Systematic Theology and Ecumenics at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, is a well-known ecclesialogist and a committed proponent of ecumenical movement in India/Asia. In the book under review, Pathil offers a brilliant and lucid presentation of ecumenism. In his treatment of the material, historical, theological, and cultural on ecumenism, the author argues that the ecumenical movement of modern times should be based on the premise “unity in diversity” (p.63). Since pluralism, cultural, religious and theological, is the order of the day and appears to be an irreversible pattern of the future, “unity in diversity” is the only acceptable model for the Ecumenical Movement in contemporary Christianity. Moreover, this premise, “unity in diversity,” is a divine command. Hence, the contemporary ecumenical movement is a God-given task, a gospel imperative, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, one cannot consider the contemporary ecumenical movement merely as a human or ecclesial attempt for unity; it must be considered an initiative to realize Christ’s prayer that “they may be one” (pp.94-95).

The book is presented in nine chapters. Although most chapters are revised and edited articles previously published in various journals, they are sequential. The first chapter, “Unity in Diversity: The Christian Model of Unity,” presents the Church’s original vision and practice of unity. The author identifies five important areas or forces that caused the division in the Church: (1) Heretical Doctrines (p.11), (2) Theological Differences (p.13), (3) Social and Cultural Factors (p.15), (4) Political Forces (p.16), and (5) Forces of Human Sin (p.18). The chapter concludes with showing the evangelical awakening of the

19th century and the subsequent missionary movements to all over the world as the immediate historical background of the contemporary Ecumenical Movement (p.20). In the second chapter, "The Twentieth-Century Encounter of the Churches," the author highlights various elements of the historical background of the contemporary Ecumenical Movement and its various trends. In addition, this chapter also includes various models employed in ecumenical dialogues, for instance, comparative method (pp.41-45), Christological method (pp.45-47), and inter-contextual method (pp.48-49). The chapter ends with providing some glimpses of the Ecumenical Movement in the new pluralistic world.

The third chapter, "Ecumenism in the New Pluralistic Context" examines the contemporary pluralistic context and presents various sources of pluralism. The author sees this new pluralistic situation, with its challenges as well as its opportunities, necessarily requiring a renewed concept of Christian unity: "unity in diversity" (p. 63). This renewed concept is not abstract, rather a "fellowship which the Church lives," "a way of being and living" as "a conciliar fellowship of local churches" (pp.64-69). In chapter four, "The Vision of an Ecumenical Church," the author briefly presents a model of ecumenical unity, which may be acceptable to all. The rest of the chapter spells out a vision for the future of ecumenical unity and ways and means to achieve this vision. The author sums up this vision in the following words: "Our vision of One Reunited Church should be clearly in terms of "a Communion of Churches" or "Fellowship of Churches" or a "Conciliar Fellowship", where all Churches must recognize each other as equals. This communion shall be grounded in the common faith and in the communion of the sacraments" (pp.80-81).

In chapters five and six, Pathil mainly discusses the understanding of ecumenical unity in the Asian Church. While the first part of chapter five, "Theology and Practice of Ecumenism in the Asian Context," discusses Catholic ecumenism since Vatican II, the second part of the chapter briefly presents the task of the Asian Churches toward ecumenical collaboration in the Asian context. Subsequently, in chapter six, "Ecumenical Structures," the author briefly surveys two major ecumenical structures in Asia: FABC (pp.10-128) and CCA (pp.128-144). In addition to these two significant ecumenical structures, the author also highlights structures such as the "Asia Ecumenical

Committee", the "Asian Movement for Christian Unity", and the "Congress of Asian Theologians" (pp.145-149). The chapter concludes with some major suggestions in the search for new ecumenical structures in Asia (pp.149-151).

Chapter seven provides a concise historical description of several Christian Denominations as well as Christian Sects (pp.152-177). At the conclusion of the chapter, the author describes some of the major characteristics of the Christian Sects and underlines the following caveat: "Their fundamentalism, sectarianism, anti-social stand and lack of ecumenical and interreligious openings are indeed serious dangers" (p.177). Chapter eight, "The Divisions among St. Thomas Christians and the Call to Unity," presents divisions that occurred among the St. Thomas Christians and highlights the various ecclesial groups among them. The chapter ends with a call for ecumenical unity among the various ecclesial groups among the St. Thomas Christians. The author sees that "unity in diversity" is possible because St. Thomas Christians are "united in the one common apostolic tradition derived from the Apostle St. Thomas" (p.193). The final chapter, "Ecumenical Formation and the Roman Catholic Church," provides a brief account of the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on ecumenism since Vatican II, especially the principles of ecumenical formation, ways and means of ecumenical formation, etc. The listing of Catholic documents on ecumenism serves as a ready reference for ecumenical education and formation (pp.203-204). The chapter is concluded by highlighting several major problems the Churches in India face today regarding ecumenism.

Pathil's book is an important contribution to the present reality of the Ecumenical Movement in the world church, particularly to the churches in Asia. His work is a must for all Christians who are involved in Ecumenical Unity in Asia. The author's writing is always clear, engaging, well reasoned out and forthright. This book may be used as a textbook on ecumenism in our seminaries, theological colleges, and religious formation houses in Asia. Catholics will find his work to be in line with the thinking and teaching of the Asian Bishops as laid out in the FABC documents.

Acharya A.J. Snehadas, **A Secret for Lovers**. A Key to the fascinating world of love, ISPCK / SYS, Delhi, 2004, 204 pages. Price Rs. 150. (\$15)

This is a book that has evolved out of praxis. Acharya Snehadas has been experimenting with an innovative form of retreat centred on the theme of love. In the light of responses from the participants he compiled this book. This genesis makes the book appealing to anyone who is in search of helping oneself and others to grow in self-love. The main thrust of the book is that love of the self is the basis for loving others, God and nature. Many psychological and spiritual problems can be healed if one develops a positive attitude to oneself.

After clarifying certain basic terms and the methodology of the *Sneha Yoga Dhyana*, the author makes a diagnosis of 136 syndromes of a person who does not love herself/himself. Then he gives practical exercises to grow in self-love. In the subsequent chapter he delineates the portrait of a person who grows in self-love. On the basis of this exercise he makes a theoretical exploration into the concepts of self and love. In the final chapter he shows how love expands from self to others, to the world, to the Divine.

There is a good synthesis of experiential wisdom and theoretical reflection in this book. The notion of love of self is clarified on the basis of the lived experience of many individuals. The terms *love* and *self* are explained also in the light of the Bible and the philosophical traditions as well as the psychological theories. An exploration into the Indian spiritual classics would have enhanced this research.

The reader will come out with a sense of relief in the realisation that love of the self is not the same as selfishness. The description of the fruits of this love in terms of self-image, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-responsibility and self-knowledge is helpful to develop a positive attitude to oneself as the healing basis for any relationship to others and to God. To develop this one needs to

overcome the negative attitudes like inferiority complex and guilt feeling. Reconciliation with oneself, with one's biography and formative environment is the primary task. For this Snehadas offers effective exercises. Such exercises are helpful to free oneself from narcissism and judgemental attitudes. This book can be recommended to anyone who struggles with the problem of deficient self-esteem, to communities which would like to improve the quality of inter-personal relationships, and to spiritual seekers in their pursuit: let me know myself, thus let me know you, God (*noverim me, noverim te*, St Augustine).

S.Painadath

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